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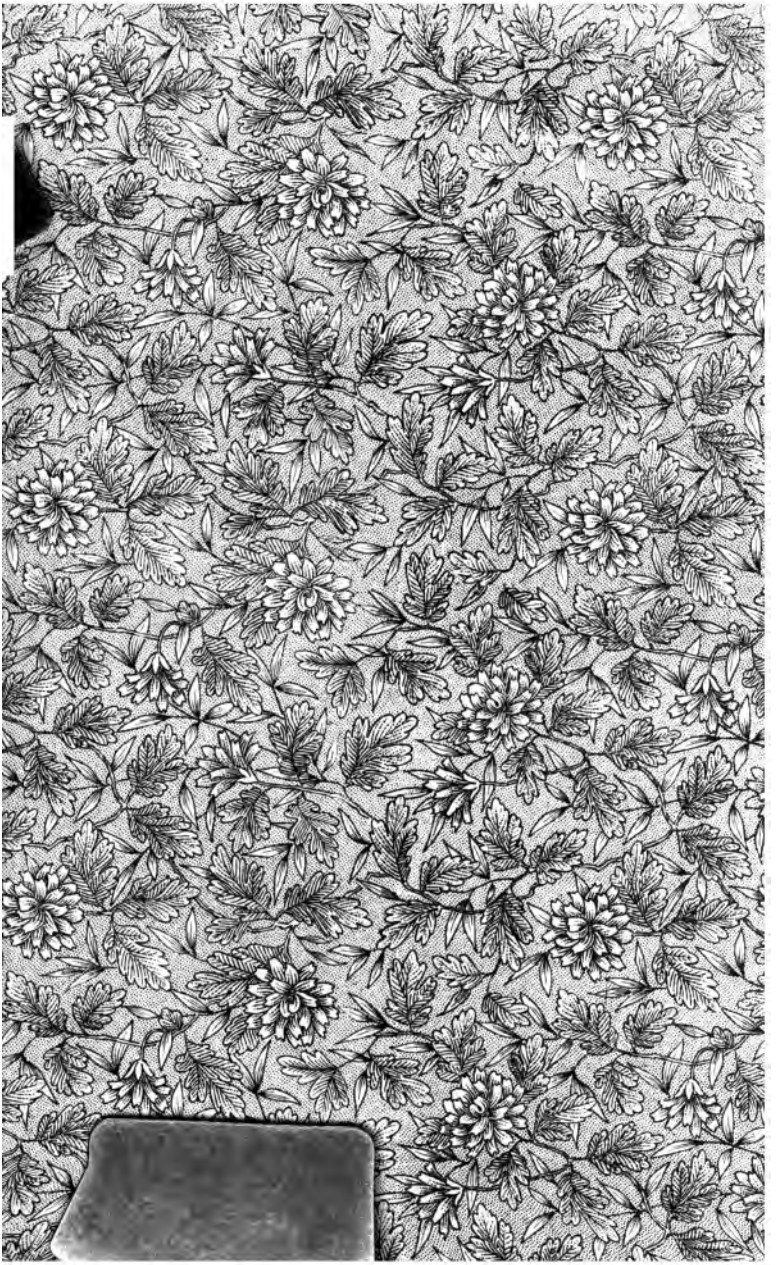
MARY ST. JOHN

MISS R. N. CAREY



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MARY ST. JOHN

MARY ST. JOHN

A Novel

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF 'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' 'WOOED AND MARRIED,' 'QUEENIE'S WHIM,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME I.

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MARY ST. JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

DOLLIE'S BIRTHDAY.

ALL her life long Dorothy Maynard remembered a certain bright windy day in September.

She was crossing Kensington Gardens; it was late in the afternoon, just verging upon evening; a certain blush and redness seemed over everything, a golden ripple and stir made up of sparkles, of the distant gleam of water, of waving tree-tops, and the sunshine playing with golden snatches on innumerable leaves.

She had been walking vaguely in a green mist; by-and-by the quiet and the shade and the flicker were all behind her; she had tripped

6 a

across the road, under the shadow of the great bronze and marble monument, into a Babel and confusion of life.

What a busy world it was! how bright! how well dressed! True, the great London flow of fashion had long ago ebbed away; the great ones of the earth—the Upper Ten Thousand had betaken themselves to other regions,—to Scotland and the Continent, or to seclusion in princely country-seats.

The houses wore a desolate and dismantled look; yet still the carriages rolled on; a fresh wind blew down Exhibition Road; the dust whirled under the horses' feet; there were plenty of children and sunshine,—for neither are ever wanting on God's earth; a certain sweet wholesomeness of fresh air and open spaces.

Dollie came briskly on, walking with erect head and clear girlish eyes that saw everything; more than one person turned round to look at the slim figure in the grey gown and the broad-brimmed hat,—a certain lightness and grace of carriage allured them, but no special beauty tempted them to look again. It was

one of Dorothy's quaint fancies to speak of herself as plain—as undeniably and unredeemably so. I am half of opinion that she really believed what she said; and, indeed, the small glass that hung in her bedroom made sad havoc of her youthful charms.

Many months afterwards she saw herself reflected full length in a gorgeous mirror; she was tripping downstairs, humming a little tune and thinking of nothing, when all at once she paused a little bewildered. At an angle of the staircase she came upon a girl—a slim creature in a green gown, with puckered sleeves, with some red and yellow dahlias in her hand—a girl with soft yellow hair and a pale face; it was quite half a minute before Dollie recognised her own high cheek-bones and rather small blue eyes. When she did so she dropped a low mocking curtsey to her image.

"You are not so bad after all, Mistress Dolly," she said, with a knowing little nod of the head; "no one in their senses could call you pretty, but you are decidedly uncommon-looking; the old glass in Abercrombie Road made you a positive fright, but you are not the

scarecrow I thought you." And Dolly gathered up her long dress, dropping one of her dahlias as she did so. It was worn as a trophy in a certain button-hole all the evening, to Dolly's secret discomposure.

She was carrying a few late roses now,—for flowers were as dear to her soul as jewels are to some highborn beauties,—and every now and then she touched them lightly and caressingly with her little gloved hand. A fellow-student at the School of Design had given them to her, and the roses and the sunshine, and the freshness of the September wind had stirred her spirits to more than their usual buoyancy.

"I am sure something is going to happen," she said to herself; for, in common with most girls, she loved dearly to indulge in a day-dream. "I am eighteen to-day. One can't go to sleep all one's life, or go dreaming on like a stagnant old mill-stream. Look at all these faces, and every one with their own story. I have not begun to live mine yet, and never shall as long as we live in that stupid out-of-the-way place,—just mother and I and no one

else." And Dorothy's sunny mood changed, and she gave a little shrug of discontent as she hastened on.

She had left South Kensington with its great squares and houses behind her, and was now threading the labyrinth of roads that lie between Kensington and Earlscourt. By-and-by the traffic ceased; she had turned aside out of the main thoroughfare, and was making her way swiftly down a dull secluded-looking road, suburban in aspect, and somewhat meagre as to gentility.

A road that had no individuality of its own, and seemed to lead vaguely to nowhere, which bore a general aspect of sameness, a little tempered and toned down by age. The houses were not modern; one could say so much for them—they had too much old-fashioned primness for that.

Some of them had seen better days; a few of them had tried the embellishments of a coat of paint, or a Virginian creeper; some had narrow little bay-windows and green verandahs. On the whole, they were meek, unpretending houses, representing meek, unpretending lives

that were lived out in them, "not one of them with a story worth reading," as Dorothy thought scornfully; for she had what is common among young people—a certain haughty intolerance of her belongings, and could be hardly made to understand that her neighbours were of the same flesh and blood as herself.

"Trevilian Terrace, Abercrombie Road,—who with a grain of sense or an ounce of imagination would consent to drag out existence in such a place?" grumbled Dorothy to herself for the nineteen-hundredth time, as she pushed open a green gate, and a moment afterwards found herself in a dark, narrow little hall.

But, as though by way of contrast, the dark little lobby opened on a small room full of evening sunshine—a room so green and bowery, with its one window so framed with Virginian creeper and the grey-blue clusters of the Wisteria, that the very canaries singing so lustily in their gilded cage could have believed themselves back in their native woods. And sitting working busily in the midst of the sunlight was a quiet little figure in black, who

raised her head and said, "Well, Dollie," in a voice that was very pleasant and very quiet too.

Dorothy and her mother were not much alike. Mrs. Maynard was a little woman, with a trim, rather youthful, figure, and reddish hair still untinged with grey.

The reddish-brown eyes had a clear, pleasant look in them; but the lines of the face were sharp and somewhat worn, and a certain droop of the head and figure gave a stamp of unconscious weariness that was somewhat pathetic.

"Well, Dollie, my dear," she said again, as she folded up her work with a nervous haste that was at times habitual to her. Dollie had merely nodded in a brisk, off-hand manner, and had thrown herself into a low basket-work chair. In a moment the broad-brimmed hat and the grey cape were on the floor beside her; the roses were falling on her lap one by one.

Mrs. Maynard carried them away, while Dollie stretched her lazy arms over her head, with a sort of unfledged grace and weariness. She was too much used to her mother's waiting

upon her to notice it; she knew the cape would be folded and the long gloves smoothed out, without any exertion of her own. What was the use of mothers if they were not to wait on "Dollies," and when Dollie was the widow's mite too—the one small treasure that remained to her out of the waste and loss of life.

So Dollie lay with her fair head buried in the green cushions, and the canaries sang, and Mrs. Maynard quietly arranged the roses, and the trim little maid brought in tea, wheeling the round table quite close to Dollie and the sunlight, and then her tongue suddenly unloosed as Mrs. Maynard knew it would, and her girlish talk quite rippled and overflowed, like a little brook when its toy dam had been destroyed.

And how Dollie could talk! and about such trifles too! I wonder how many girls, coming in from a day's work or a country walk, could find such fruitful matter for conversation, and serve it up smilingly at the family meal as Dollie could day after day.

She talked so picturesquely, too, of the flowers and the sunshine; of the crowds in

Exhibition Road; of the crippled boy in his wheeled chair, under the trees in Kensington Gardens; of the one-legged crossing-sweeper, who always said, "Bless your sweet face, my lady," which brought him in a harvest of Dollie's pennies; of her work at the School of Design, with all sorts of little quizzing remarks on her companions; and whatever she said, however trivial and foolish, Dollie knew her voice was like music to her mother's ears.

"You are very happy, my dear, to-night," with a little sigh.

"Happy—well, yes, I suppose so," returned Dollie nonchalantly; "it is no good being miserable because it is one's birthday. I did think as I walked along that it would be nice to be like other girls, and have lots of presents and nice dresses, and to go out to balls; we live in such a sober, middle-aged fashion, seeing no one but the curate and the doctor and a few old ladies. "For my part," continued Dollie, with charming frankness, "I am sick of old ladies; and old gentlemen are almost as bad—not quite, perhaps, because they say nice things, which the old ladies don't."

"Do you hate Mrs. Trelawney, Dollie?"

"Old Mrs. Trelawney! she is an old dear, and I love her; she is a jewel among the old ladies. When I meet her waddling down the road, with her fat spaniel behind her, I think she is a perfect angel,—only angels are not short in their breathing, but I am pretty sure she is as good as gold."

"Miss Lamartine is as good as gold too."

Dollie pursed up her lips, and shook her head vehemently.

"Ah, but she is; just look at her devotion to her bedridden father!"

"That may be, but she is an old maid; and one can't have anything in common with old maids."

"For shame, Dollie! you may be one yourself some day."

"What! an old maid? a hundred years hence, perhaps; but of course," a little discontentedly, "I can't expect anything else, living in a place like this. Do you think anyone could marry old Mr. Frier, or that sandy-haired, washed-out Mr. O'Brien—an Evangelical Irishman, too."

"Then if your fate is to be like hers, you ought not to say such hard things of Miss Lamartine."

"What hard things?" and Dollie opened her eyes. "I only said she was an old maid! poor misguided woman! why does she not turn up her thin hair, and wear a cap and a plain black gown, and make herself look well dressed and comfortable. When I am an old maid I mean to take to caps; and I shall not expect young girls to come and make a fuss over me; I shall visit at the children's hospital—the poor little things will be glad enough to see me; and I will have birds—dozens of them; not the typical cat—not even a tabby kitten; and I will pick out a few nice old gentlemen of my acquaintance—no snuff-taker available—who will come and talk politics to me once or twice a week."

"My dear," remonstrated her mother, "are you not talking a little wildly?"

"Wildly? well, perhaps I am, but did you not begin the subject, madre mia, and when you know I detest Miss Lamartine. Oh dear, this restlessness! I wonder if it be very

wicked, or if it be only very young to have one's nature working up like yeast, and to be always fermenting in a sort of inward excitement; if only something would happen; but nothing ever does happen."

"Don't be too sure of anything in this world, my dear;" and Mrs. Maynard's lip trembled a little. "It is my Dollie's birthday, just the day for a pleasant surprise; and then one ought never to be too sure of anything."

Dollie's blue eyes were opened wide enough now. "Do you mean that you have a pleasant surprise for me, mother?" and then she laughed a little scornfully over her own words; for her quiet, well-assured life held no mysteries in it, and she was somewhat incredulous of change. Changes were good; they were better than most things in life, but none would ever come to her.

"That is for you to decide," returned her mother, quietly. "Here is a letter that I have lately received, and on which I must ask your opinion; whether it be pleasant or not you must own that at least it is a surprise. You

remember that I have spoken to you before of my aunt, Mrs. Reid?"

Dollie nodded assent; her curiosity was too impatient to allow of any pause for answer; her hands quite trembled with excitement as they unfolded the thin foreign paper.

Of course she knew all about Mrs. Reid; there were no secrets, no possible mysteries between her mother and her. Dollie knew all about her mother's former life, and had often compared it somewhat discontentedly with her own.

Mrs. Maynard had been the only child of wealthy parents; all sorts of wonderful things had happened to her in her girlhood; its record read like a glittering fairy story to our Dollie, a sort of impromptu Arabian Nights' Entertainment; she had gone with her parents everywhere—to Venice, to Rome, and once to Constantinople; the villa on Lake Maggiore, the Châlet at Lucerne, the woodman's hut in the Black Forest, where the belated travellers had remained for a night, were as well known to her as Cinderella's Glass Slipper or the Castle of Bluebeard were to other children.

Another person had formed part of the household in those days,—a fair-haired girl, her father's only sister, whom Mrs. Maynard called Aunt Isabel. She had drawn certain sketches of her that were very alluring in Dollie's eyes. She would think with pleasure of the bright young aunt who told stories and sang wonderful old ballads, who came dancing into the nursery in the summer twilight to show her pretty ball-dresses and trinkets to the wondering child.

Then had come a change; a certain shadow had fallen on the house; there had been disagreements—loud, angry voices that seemed to sound everywhere—Aunt Isabel had gone away weeping, saying that she was ill-used by her only brother, and would never forgive him. By-and-by they told the child that Aunt Isabel would never come back. She had married a very rich man—a certain Mr. Reid, whom nobody liked or respected; and after that they said no more. And so the thread of her mother's story ran on; to the petted childhood succeeded a happier girlhood, and while still very young she had been wooed and won

by Richard Maynard, a young officer in the Line. All had gone smoothly at first; he had nothing but his pay, but Mrs. Maynard's parents were rich. But before the brief honeymoon was over the first blow fell. Her father's property was invested mostly in mining shares; these were found to be insecure; the vein of iron-ore had suddenly ceased to yield; in the general panic that ensued it was found that the shareholders were liable for immense sums, and when Margaret Maynard returned home it was to find that her father was virtually ruined.

Even this could have been borne if it had not led to separation from his only child. It had been Mr. Tilney's intention to assist his son-in-law to exchange into a regiment that was not likely to see active service; it was with this proviso that he had given him his daughter. All this was now altered. Captain Maynard's regiment was at once ordered to Southampton, *en route* for India, and poor Margaret had to take leave of her broken-hearted parents, and follow her young husband across the seas.

True, she loved him with her whole heart

and soul, but she was scarcely more than a girl; and this sundering of all her home ties was a very bitter ordeal. But, alas! this was only the beginning of troubles.

Sad indeed was the record of those Indian summers; every year seemed to bring her new trials and losses. First the news of her parents' death—one after another—followed her. Then came still heavier troubles: two boys and one girl had been born to them beside Dollie, but one by one they had been snatched away, and before many years were over Major Maynard had succumbed to jungle fever on one of his toilsome marches; and the broken-hearted widow, clasping her little daughter to her bosom, fled panic-stricken from the land of graves, as she always called it, and came back to England sad and solitary, to begin life over again—this time not for her own but for Dollie's sake.

And so the years passed on, and but for her child her life would have been absolutely joyless. She had been a woman much given to idolatry—to that interior and engrossing idolatry which lies at the heart of some women.

It was not that she was without the consolations of religion, but that the living objects of her love engrossed her so completely.

While her husband lived, her children had been less to her—not that they had not been dear to her, for she was of all mothers most tender and full of care; but her husband had been the lord and master of her life, the possessor of her very inmost and secret soul, from whom she had no reservation and hardly a separate thought.

When he died her heart had turned to stone. She told herself that no widow was ever so completely widowed than she, that henceforth no joy of life was possible to her.

But Dollie had altered this; by-and-by the small live fingers crept round the numb heart-strings, and played them into music again. Warmth came into the desolate bosom; Dollie became first an interest, then an occupation, and presently an absorbing passion; the old worship and idolatry revived. She ceased to look so mournfully at the wrecks of her former life; she must smile and try to forget sometimes for Dollie's sake; she must

not blight her youth with her sadness. And so for her child's sake Mrs. Maynard lived down her great sorrow, and a certain golden haze—closely approximate to sunshine—stole into her sorely-tried life.

CHAPTER II.

THE BUDGET OPENED.

MRS. MAYNARD looked at her daughter rather sadly, as Dollie, with flushed face and trembling fingers, read the letter. How long and closely written it seemed to be! Had it fallen from the stars she could hardly have been more surprised. Could anything really be about to happen?

"My dear Margaret," it began; and that in itself was a marvel to Dollie, who had never heard her mother called by her Christian name—

"MY DEAR MARGARET—I wonder if you have any recollection of the Aunt Isabel who used to play with you in the old nursery in Portman Square? or whether I shall have to recall myself to your memory? You were such a little creature then, and I nothing better than a grown-up, wayward child.

"I will say nothing of the circumstances that led to

such complete separation; girls are sometimes self-willed, and it may be that I was in the wrong. But if your mother had been more judicious and less intolerant in her judgment, she might have healed instead of widening the breach that caused me to throw off my brother's protection and leave his house.

"Ah well! I was with them when they died, and all was understood between us then; but I never knew why it was that when the news of their death reached you, my letters were not sent with it. I think, had our correspondence commenced then, that we should never have lost sight so completely of one another.

"From that day to this I have never succeeded in tracing you to your present address. The merest chance —a casual encounter with an old neighbour of yours— has led to the discovery of your whereabouts here. True, I read the announcement of your husband's death in the papers, but I could gain no intelligence of your movements, until I learned quite recently that you were living with your daughter in a secluded part of Kensington.

"You would doubtless have heard of me, but since my husband's death I have quitted Crome Park,—the property Mr. Reid bought soon after our marriage,—and have lived abroad. My bad health, and other circumstances with which I will not trouble you, has led me to adopt a wandering life. Many people have attributed my avoidance of my native country to pure caprice, and I am loath to disturb the conjecture. The opinions of the world—my world—have long been nought to me. Two years ago my health improved,

and I grew weary of travelling and of foreign watering-places, and as an old chateau in the neighbourhood of Lesponts took my fancy, I purchased it, and settled down with a distant connection of my husband, Charlotte Morell, who acts as my companion.

"Some of my husband's relatives have visited me from time to time; one of these—Mary St. John—has promised to pay me a long visit this autumn.

"I am telling you all this that you may know how I am circumstanced—a lonely woman growing old, and indebted for stray visits of charity from distant connections.

"And now to the point and gist of my long letter. Can you, my dear and unknown niece, be induced to leave your quiet English home and visit me in my Flemish chateau. You shall not be parted from your daughter; bring her with you, and she will be a companion to Mary St. John.

"I could plead many arguments in my favour, but I will say no more until I hear your views on the matter, and will only subscribe myself your long-lost aunt, ISABEL REID."

"Mother!" broke from Dollie's impetuous lips as she laid down the letter—two bright spots of scarlet were in her cheeks; her eyes shone with eagerness; "Mother! how shall you answer this letter?"

"I have answered it," returned the widow gently. "Forgive me, my dear," as an in-

credulous exclamation burst from her daughter; "forgive me if I kept this matter to myself for some days; it troubled me greatly, and I could not talk about it—not even to my child. When I had made up my mind, I wrote a long letter to Mrs. Reid."

"You answered it, and never told me one word about it!" and the tones of Dollie's voice, injured and a little shrill, brought a flush to the mother's face. For a moment she felt like a culprit before her child. Never since her Dolly had emerged from childhood had that simple heart kept anything to itself.

"Hush, my dear! Indeed you must listen to me a moment. I thought it better to keep my own counsel in this. You could not help me. For this once I knew we must be content to differ."

"To differ, mother! What do you mean?"

"Does the word displease you? Indeed, it is a true word. How could you put yourself in my place—a young thing like you, with all life before you?" and then she paused. How could she bring herself to tell her child that the change—that Dollie was already antici-

pating with such joyful eagerness—was absolutely impossible to her; that she had so grown into the narrowed grooves of her present quiet life that any emergence from thence was like death to her; that to sit beside a strange hearth and fit her words and purposes to the will of others, would be so galling to her crushed spirit, that she would not bring herself to undergo it. As she had lain awake pondering over the matter during more than one sleepless night, she had told herself bitterly that no shadowy ghost revisiting the haunts of men would feel more absolutely unfit for human duties and the usages of society than she would feel if she stirred out of the niche into which she had almost grown. And yet if she said such things to her child, would Dollie understand her—Dollie whose pulses were already beating high with excitement, while her own were so faint and sluggish.

"If I were to talk until midnight you would not comprehend me," she said, with a quiet hopelessness which came with a sort of shock to Dollie. "You are young, and I am getting old—old, and tired and weak—and I cannot

bring myself to do things now. You cannot understand me, and that is all I have to say—that I am tired, and cannot do things any longer."

"Mother, why will you make me so unhappy by talking so. You are not old. You have not a grey hair—not a single one. You are as young and sweet and pretty as ever." And Dolly was now on her knees caressing the widow's thin hands, and laying them against her warm young face. "You shall not talk against yourself to me; my mother will never be old."

"Have you a charm against time, Dolly," she asked, with a faint smile; but her voice was very sad. "No, my dear, no; you are young, and these things are possible to you. I wish I could have done it for your sake; but I am obliged to confess that it would be too hard for me. Do not let us talk about it any more. You shall read what my answer was in Mrs. Reid's second letter." And then Dollie read it.

"I have been ill again, my dear Margaret," it began, "and I fear that in consequence my letter must be brief. I shall not attempt to shake your resolution—

greatly as it has disappointed me—or to persuade you that such change as I would offer you might do you good. Your letter speaks for itself, and I am too well acquainted with trouble to be surprised at what you tell me. I mean to be very patient, and to let you get used to the idea; and perhaps next spring, if I be living then, you may feel more equal to the exertion. No, I will not seek to persuade you—not yet. I will even praise you, and tell you how good it is of you to spare your child to me for a little. Indeed, my dear Margaret, I will do all in my power to make her visit pleasant to her. I have told you that Miss St. John is coming to me next month. I have not yet made her acquaintance, but from all accounts I think she must be charming. If so she will be a nice companion for Dorothy. Last year her brother Maurice paid me a visit. He is a truly excellent man; but in some respects I thought him weak. Our Church views differed, and on the whole, we scarcely agreed. Unfortunately I took the strongest aversion to his wife. She struck me as ambitious and designing. I am rather prone to strong likes and dislikes; and I have never asked them to repeat their visit.

"I trust Miss St. John will be more to my taste. They are my husband's nearest connections, and I am anxious to do my duty by them. But I must break off here now, as a recurrence of my old pain is numbing my fingers. I will write again in a day or two and let you know all particulars."

And then somewhat abruptly the letter ended.

"Is that all, mother?"

"No; I had another note this morning. You will see from that how generous and thoughtful my aunt seems to be for your comfort. Well,"—as Dollie let it fall on her mother's lap with a little gesture of astonishment,—"will not these arrangements please you?"

"Please me! I suppose so. But I am so bewildered that you should have settled all this with a stranger, and never even told me!" And indeed there was much room for bewilderment in the girl's mind.

Mrs. Reid's third letter was very business-like and a little peremptory. She informed her niece somewhat curtly that she intended to provide for the girl's journey, and enclosed a ten-pound note for any incidental expenses. She excused herself for choosing a somewhat circuitous route for the traveller, but without giving any reason for such choice; but added that all necessary arrangements had been made, and everything settled with the St. Johns; and that she wished Mrs. Maynard to make their acquaintance without delay, and

introduce the girls to each other. The date fixed for the visit was surprisingly near, and the letter ended with a renewed assurance that Dorothy should be made heartily welcome by herself and Charlotte Morell. It was a kind letter in spite of its peremptoriness; but Dorothy felt a little afraid of the writer, and though her cheeks still glowed with excitement, she looked a little thoughtful.

"Well, Dollie, my dear," said her mother, with an evident effort at cheerfulness; "are you not going to praise me too? Do you not think I am good to spare you?"

"Do you mean that I am to go and leave you alone?" asked the girl slowly.

"Yes, dear; that is exactly what I do mean. I cannot go myself, but I must not bind my child down to my quiet life. It is not good for you. It is not right. Young things like you need change and movement. My Dollie must not be unlike other girls. She must see the world."

"But to leave you all alone! No, mother darling, it is not possible."

"It will only be for two months," pleaded

Mrs. Maynard. "Mrs. Reid does not ask you for longer. You will write to me. And I shall be very busy; and I shall be looking forward to your return, and to all the news you will bring me. Think of all the advantages it offers. And then I cannot help feeling as though we owe some little duty to Mrs. Reid."

"Do you really mean what you say, mother, —that you wish me to go?"

"Yes, indeed, my child, I really wish it;" and Mrs. Maynard's voice, though it trembled a little, still preserved its cheerfulness. Had she not nerved herself to the sacrifice. Had she not vowed to herself with many tears that Dollie should never know what this first parting with her treasure would cost her—her child who had never been absent from her for a single night. No wonder the prospect of those two months was strangely dreary to the poor mother. "For your sake," she continued more firmly, "I do indeed wish it; and I think—I cannot help thinking—that Mrs. Reid has some sort of claim upon us."

"If it were a duty, and if it were not for leaving you—oh, mother, how delicious it would

be," exclaimed the girl with a little burst, "to see strange cities and strange things. Not to get up every morning, and do just the same things all day long—just trudge up and down Exhibition Road in the dust and sunshine, and come home and see Susan and the tea-things——"

"And me," put in her mother softly, which interruption made Dollie suddenly fall on her neck, with many protestations and kisses.

"Then it is settled, and to-morrow we will go and introduce ourselves to the St. Johns. And now, if you will call Susan, we will have prayers, and go to bed. No, indeed, Dollie; it is growing late, and I will not talk about it any more to-night." And somewhat awed by this unusual firmness on the part of that tender mother, Dollie reluctantly submitted to silence.

CHAPTER III.

BIDDY OPENS THE DOOR.

It was somewhat late in the afternoon of the following day when Mrs. Maynard and her daughter set out to pay their intended visit to the St. Johns.

Dorothy, for the first time in her life, was almost dumb with astonishment at her mother's unwonted activity and decision of manner; the little nervous flurry that characterised the widow's usual movements was for once laid aside. "To-morrow we will go and call on the St. Johns," she had said, in a quiet, business-like way, as though calling on strangers was a thing habitual to her; and yet Dollie knew that her mother had a morbid dread of new acquaintances.

They seemed to have changed characters all of a sudden. Dollie seemed a little shy of

the whole business, and had turned decidedly prim. In the first place the address displeased her—The Rev. Maurice St. John, 23 Lime Street, Whitechapel. Her girlish pride took alarm immediately.

"Who ever heard of such a place?" she grumbled. "Mother, how can they be gentlefolks, and live in such a dreadful neighbourhood." And Dollie drew her dainty raiment more closely round her, as they threaded their way somewhat dubiously through the hot, unsavoury streets.

"The clergy cannot always choose very desirable residences," returned Mrs. Maynard quietly; "and the vicar told me yesterday that he knew Mr. St. John slightly; that he was a young, hard-working man, who had applied many years ago for a city curacy, because he had an enthusiasm for mission work. Unfortunately he fell in love, and married on rather a small income; and from what Mr. Roberts told me, I fancy he is a little overworked, and anxious to exchange his work for a country curacy, most likely for the sake of his wife and family."

"Poor creatures!" observed Dollie, pathetically; and now indeed Trevilian Terrace, Abercrombie Road, blossomed in her memory as a sort of earthly paradise, as she glanced round her at the slip-shod squalor and dirt that seemed to encompass their footsteps.

They had left the main road, with its butcher's shops and noise, and rough-voiced crowd, behind them, and were now in a quieter neighbourhood. The houses were tall and shabby; smartly-dressed Jewesses—for it was Saturday—congregated in small groups round some of the open windows; black-eyed children, with unwashed faces, and bright-bead necklaces showed their marked physiognomy at every corner; ragged, bare-footed children played in the gutter; miserable women, with thin-faced babies, glided in and out the courts and alleys; oaths, dirt, the shrill voices of children everywhere. No wonder Dollie shrank closer to her mother with a little gesture of disgust.

"Madre! it is impossible; no lady could live here."

"Not in this street; but, my dear, just

think what I have just told you—an enthusiastic man full of love for his kind and needing work. Look around you; do you see no scope for mission work here?"

"I know I should like to wash those children's faces, and give them something to eat. Are there two worlds I wonder—one in Exhibition Road and one in Whitechapel? Why must some people be always cold and hungry? there seems to me so little justice in this sort of thing!" broke in the young heretic, for the Dollies of this world would have everything bright and sunshiny.

"I am afraid these things are too high for our comprehension," returned her mother with a sigh. "As long as the world lasts there will be pain; we must take life as it is, not as it looks to us. Wherever one walks there are always patches and bare feet shining in the sunlight. Perhaps these contrasts are to teach us something." But Dollie turned away rather impatiently from this gentle moralising.

"Yes, yes, that is all very well; but one wants to know the meaning of things: why those poor babies are born, when there is no

room for them; why they live to grow up to find their happiness in the gutters, to wear rags, to thieve, perhaps to do worse. Mother," continued the girl solemnly and yet with a little excitement, "look at that poor, weazen-faced baby that that tawdry-looking woman is carrying; who knows, if it lives, that it may not grow up to be a housebreaker or a murderer, and yet it looks as innocent as an angel now."

"A terrible thought, Dollie; but it strikes me we are getting a little out of our depth; women feel too much ever to become good philosophers. Look what a quiet, respectable street we are entering; there is the sugar-bakery at the corner; from the description Mr. Roberts gave me, I am sure it must be Lime Street; some of the houses look quite trim and comfortable."

"We have not yet got rid of the Jewesses," returned Dollie in a quizzing voice.

"No, but they seem of a better sort; we passed some lovely faces just now. In this sort of neighbourhood I fancy one must be thankful for small mercies; for clean pavements and washed doorsteps, and bright knockers, for

example. Yes, this is twenty-three, and really the house looks large and comfortable." But Dollie, who was put out with her walk, only gave one of her dissenting shrugs; not even the clean steps and the bright windows and the glories of a brass knocker could elicit the faintest commendation.

"If there is one thing I detest more than another, it is a shabby-genteel house," she said a little sulkily, before the door was opened.

Mrs. St. John was at home, and would be with them directly, but Miss St. John was at the schools, was the answer to their inquiries in unmistakable brogue. But as Biddy was clean and good-tempered-looking, Mrs. Maynard found nothing amiss in the coarse bib-apron; only Dollie groaned in spirit as she muttered, "Maid-of-all-work!" to herself, and followed her mother reluctantly upstairs.

They passed the open doors of two light, airy-looking rooms, in one of which some children were at play; the room they entered was evidently the drawing-room, or at least the best room of the family.

It was a pleasant, old-fashioned room, with

brown wainscot, and three narrow windows, with wooden window-seats. On one of them a girl was sitting, or rather crouching in a heap, reading. A bird sang in the sunshine; some flowers in a green stand bloomed gaily; in spite of the worn carpet, almost denuded of its pattern, and the faded, washed-out chintz, there was a homely air of comfort that attracted them. Evidently Mrs. St. John was a good manager.

"My dear, are you one of Mrs. St. John's children?" asked Mrs. Maynard, advancing with a kind smile to the window-seat. The girl uncurled herself somewhat awkwardly, and looked at the intruders with frightened eyes.

"Yes, I am the eldest—Lettice. I hope Biddy has told mamma. I—I will go for her," becoming conscious all at once of her shabby frock and rough hair, as she caught sight of Dollie's fresh radiance.

"No, do not trouble yourself; your mother will be here directly, and we are in no hurry. How old are you, and what is that book you are reading?" and Dollie, who had recovered from her brief ill-humour, and was determined to

make herself agreeable, smiled at her in such a fascinating manner that Lettice was quite dazzled.

"I am thirteen, at least nearly thirteen, and I am reading father's *Paradise Lost.* I don't think Satan ought to be quite so interesting, do you?" looking up in Dollie's face with large dark eyes, full of intelligence. But Dollie, who was much bewildered by this unexpected question, was spared all answer, for a voice said somewhat sharply, "Hush, Lettice," and turning round, they saw that Mrs. St. John had entered the room.

Dollie afterwards confessed to her mother that the first sight of Mrs. St. John almost took away her breath. An exotic in a garret would not have been a greater contrast than this grand-looking woman, set off so strangely and yet so intensely by the shabby background and homely accessories round her.

"An Esther or a Judith in a nineteenth-century print dress all the worse for washing," as Dollie quaintly described her afterwards, and somehow the simile was not inapt.

For, in Dollie's opinion, there was some-

thing suppressed and tragic in Mrs. St. John's appearance, although to most people she would only have seemed a grave handsome-looking woman of rather an unusual type of beauty.

She was very tall; but she carried her height with a grace that was simply perfect, and the pose of the head and neck was magnificent. Mrs. Maynard thought her proud and a little chilling; but to Dollie the pale face and dark eyes were full of unspoken eloquence. And then her voice,—in spite of its sharp thinness,—how it seemed to change and vibrate and soften! Very few voices, Dollie thought, held so much in them. She was quite angry when Mrs. Maynard called her a little abrupt.

"We have been looking for you all the afternoon, Mary and I; and now Mary has gone out with my husband. They are at the schools," explained Mrs. St. John in her harsh, vibrating voice, which, nevertheless, held such musical chords to Dollie's ear; "they will not be long, and you shall have some tea; and when you are rested they will be back, and Mary and your daughter can have their chat,"

she went on with a perfectly well-bred suavity which rather extinguished poor Mrs. Maynard. If Mrs. St. John were a duchess she could not be more urbane and condescending.

"I ought to say a word about our intrusion first," begun Mrs. Maynard mildly; but the younger woman interrupted her at once.

"Pray, do not mention such a word. Mrs. Reid's introduction is sufficient. We have been expecting you, but Mary's conscience would not be satisfied, and she was full of excuses. My sister-in-law is one of those painfully conscientious people who pile up duties until molehills become mountains; she is my husband's right hand in the parish; she has quite taken my place, for when one has a house full of children, outside business must be curtailed."

"Have you — are there many children," asked Dollie rather shyly, for she saw her mother was somewhat suppressed by Mrs. St. John's serene flow of words.

"Yes, we have five girls," and here there was an unmistakable sigh; "five little girls— rather unfortunate for a poor curate who has

to make his way in the world." But though Mrs. St. John affected a light smile as she spoke, her visitor's practised ear caught the weary dissatisfied tone.

And being a woman of keen penetration she noticed something else, that as her mother spoke, an expression of pain crossed Lettice's face, as though the words troubled her. She looked up eagerly, as though she would say something, and then thought better of it, and buried herself in her book again. Her awkward stoop attracted Mrs. St. John's sharp eyes.

"You have your book in your lap again, Lettice; there, put it down, and tell Biddy to bring us some tea, and then stay with the children and amuse them. No, leave the book with me for the present," as the child hesitated. "She is such a bookworm that we are obliged to watch her closely, or her whole time would be spent in reading," she observed apologetically, as Lettice withdrew looking abashed and uncomfortable.

"I am sure she is very clever," returned Mrs. Maynard, whose maternal heart yearned over all children. She was somewhat attracted

by the child's appearance; it was strange that the mother and daughter should be such contrasts. Lettice was certainly very awkward and uncouth-looking; the long legs had outgrown the shabby frock; but the thin, pale face —though it was very plain—was redeemed from positive ugliness by the bright intelligence of expression. "She looks clever, and good too," she continued hesitatingly.

"Yes, Lettice is a good girl," returned Mrs. St. John, somewhat carelessly; "she needs to be clever, for she has no beauty, poor thing!" and Mrs. Maynard perceived that poor Lettice's want of attractions was very galling to the mother.

"It is an awkward age. I recollect when Dollie was all legs and arms," she observed smiling.

"I do not think your daughter could ever have been awkward," returned Mrs. St. John, looking at Dollie with momentary interest. "Lettice has more angularity than most children of her age, and then she grows so fast! She resembles her father in face; none of my children take after me but little Bee the

youngest. They are all tall and thin. But I should like you to see Bee;" and her manner became more animated. "But here is your tea, and I think I hear my husband and Mary coming in." And the next moment Mr. St. John and his sister entered the room.

No two people could have been less alike; it was difficult to imagine them brother and sister. If the children took after their father, no wonder poor Mrs. St. John had reason to sigh over their want of beauty.

Mr. St. John was a plain—a very plain man. He was very tall, and his thinness made him appear more so; and his gait was awkward, degenerating into a sort of stoop, perhaps with weakness. He had a pale, long face like Lettice's, and his nose was large and somewhat too prominent, and his fair hair and the poorness of his colouring gave him a sickly, washed-out look. Nevertheless his voice was pleasant, and when he spoke his ugliness became a thing of no moment.

His sister was darker and stouter, and had a healthy sunburnt look. She was not without some comeliness; but though she had beau-

tiful grey eyes, she was short-sighted like her brother, and carried eye-glasses. Dollie said afterwards to her mother: "Miss St. John is not at all handsome, and no one would dream of calling her pretty; but I never liked a face so much in my life; it is such a dear face!"

"Well, my wife!" was Mr. St. John's first words, after he and his sister had exchanged cordial greetings with their visitors—greetings that somehow warmed and set them at their ease in a moment; "where are Lettice and the children?" and his eyes moved anxiously round the room until they fell on the worn copy of Milton, and then they lit up well pleased: "What! has my little Eve been at her stolen fruit again?"

"Lettice is with the children. You are so tired, Maurice, and so are our visitors," pleaded his wife; but as she spoke a change seemed to pass over her; her voice and even her features softened as though by magic; hard, cold, and egotistical as Mrs. St. John might seem to others, she loved her husband dearly.

This love had been the ruin of her life and

his, so she told herself in those morbid wild moods of hers; and yet if her life could be given to her again she could not do otherwise.

He was her fate, and she could not choose but love him; his goodness, his saintliness, his unselfishness—qualities all so opposed and contrasted to her own—had drawn the very heart out of her breast, and delivered it up captive to his will. Had she ever been able to resist him? She had loved gaiety; she had been courted and caressed, and had planned great things with her beauty; the purple and fine linen of this world had been dear to her very soul. It was in her ambitious self-seeking nature to sell herself to the highest bidder, and to crush all gentler feelings under the chariot-wheels of her favourite fetish, power. To be rich, to have plenty of loaves and fishes, and to rejoice in unlimited influence over others, these were the secret desires of her soul, the planned purposes of her life. But Maurice came and wedded her to him and poverty, and she had been conquered yet rebellious ever since.

She could not choose but love him, but

this love had cost them both dear. In her inmost thoughts she was never false to him; and yet there were times when she loathed her very life—when the yoke of her existence was so bitter to her that she could have stretched out her hands to her husband and prayed him to kill her rather than subject her to such misery.

For she loved the worker, but had no sympathy with the work.

And herein lay her grievance.

It was not enough that they were poor,—she knew that, when she married him; it was not enough that she worked hard, rising early, and taking rest late, that he and his children might be well clothed and comfortable; but he was ever reproaching her in his mild way for her lack of interest in all that made up his life.

While Maurice loved his kind with a passionate love, that had led him, well educated and delicately nurtured as he was, to find scope for his wide energies in a neglected East-end parish, Janet merely tolerated them. She was clever; she had good health; she had

plenty of energy; if the work had pleased her she would have made herself his invaluable helpmate,—whatever she did was done better than by other people; but she set herself silently against the work; in her inmost soul she hated it; it was not worthy of her husband; it was ignoble, drudging,—nay more, it was killing him.

The dirt, the squalor, the vice of their surroundings caused her positive agony. Was Maurice, with all his talents, his influence, his vast energy, to throw away his life and hers—nay more, his children's—in working among the wretched courts and alleys of an East-end parish; were those sermons, whose eloquence might have roused thousands, to be silenced by an envious superior, or else spoken to almost empty walls; was his precious health to be ruined by hours of ministration spent in noisome haunts, while she trembled and wept for his safety at home, and yet would he listen to her?

"You do not sympathise with my work, and yet you love me, Janet," he had said once to her very sadly, when he was more

than usually weary and cast down, and for once the sight of her great beauty failed to gladden him. "A wife should enter into all her husband's interests; is it not so, my dear?" drawing her closer to him as he spoke; for he was ever lover-like and fond in his ways.

"Mary is coming to live with us, and she will be able to help you more," she replied evasively, not drawing herself away, for such caresses were dear to her; but he remembered afterwards that she had failed to answer him fully, and her silence and want of response had saddened him still more.

And yet what could she have told him?—that she hated his work, and hated it chiefly for his sake; that it was her rival, defrauding her of his time and thoughts; that whereas her heart belonged solely to him and his children and Mary, his was shared with every Jew-baby that danced with glee in its mother's arms at the sight of him—women, children, animals, everything helpless and weak and suffering, seeming to find room and to spare in that great heart of his.

His very children threatened to become

her rivals too. The poor little girls, whose sex was such a disappointment to Janet, who had ardently desired boys, were perfect joys and treasures of beauty in their father's eyes.

He had his way now, as she knew he would; for Maurice was pre-eminently master in his own house; and they came up presently—four tall lank children, impoverished in colouring, and with fair hair like their father's, and with plain droll faces. There they were scrambling over him with their shabby frocks and long legs—all but the youngest, little Bee, who sat dimpling and laughing, a perfect little rosebud of a child, on her mother's lap. One thing, they all had sweet voices like their father's, which, in Mrs. Maynard's opinion, went far to reconcile her to their plainness, as she sat benevolently smiling at the family group.

"There they all are, Mrs. Maynard," announced Maurice proudly; "my five fingers I call them—my little helpers and workers—Lettice and Hatty, Rosie, May, and Beatrice, whom we call Bee, our busy Bee, who gathers honey out of every flower, bless her dear little

heart!" and he clapped his hands at the flushed, beautiful child.

Janet kissed her passionately. "My beauty bright—mother's own dear beauty," she whispered, as she picked out a dainty little cake for her darling.

May, who was second youngest, and who was an uninteresting-looking little girl with pale blue eyes, looked on enviously and seemed almost inclined to cry, until Bee benevolently invited her to the first bite.

"No, Baby, the cake is yours; May will have her tea presently," interposed the mother jealously.

"No, no; let Bee share it with her sister," remonstrated Maurice. "That is right, my little love; another and another taste for poor May. Nothing is so sweet as when it is shared with others; remember that, children." And, spurred on to unusual generosity by her father's praise, Bee shut her eyes tightly and gave her last mouthful to May.

"May I not give her another, Maurice?" whispered Janet, much touched by this magnanimity on the part of her darling.

"Certainly not. What, bribe virtue! offer a reward to benevolence! Come to me, Baby; father can tell you a pretty story that is nicer than all the cakes in existence;" and then he gathered his little daughter to him and covered her face and dimpled neck with kisses.

Mrs. Maynard's reserve and quietness quite expanded into friendliness before half an hour was over — Mrs. St. John she admired but disliked; Mr. St. John she could almost love.

Meanwhile the girls in a distant window-seat were making giant strides towards intimacy.

"I am sure we shall get on well together—it will not be my fault if we don't. I am determined to be particularly and persistently friendly. Your mother calls you Dollie; is your name Dorothy? What a pretty old-fashioned name! Do you know, I am very seldom Miss St. John, or even Mary, though my sister-in-law calls me so sometimes. Most people call me Aunt Mary—it ——"

"Aunt Mary!"

"Yes; it began with the children of course.

I am always Aunt Mary to them; and then Maurice fell into the habit, and afterwards Janet, and then other people took to it too. It has got into a sort of pet-name at last."

"I am sure you would never be Aunt Mary to me."

"Wait and see; it will come quite naturally soon. I don't mean you to be Miss Maynard when we get abroad; they will be all strangers there, and we must fraternise."

"Will it not be delightful?" broke in Dollie rapturously; "seeing all those strange places, I mean."

"Indeed it will," responded Miss St. John heartily. "I have been looking forward to my holiday with the greatest pleasure, only I wish Maurice and Janet and the children could come too. Do you think my brother is looking very thin?" she continued anxiously. "I mean, does he strike you as seeming very delicate? Janet is always alarming me with all sorts of dreadful suggestions; she says he is overworked, losing flesh and appetite, and that the air of these confined streets is killing him by inches."

"Mr. St. John does not certainly look very robust; but then you see I am no good judge."

"Strangers sometimes see things more clearly than relatives," returned Mary thoughtfully; "and then one is always so anxious over those one loves, and certainly Maurice is not the man to spare himself."

"Have you always lived here?" questioned Dollie a little abruptly; she was less interested in discussing Mr. St. John's health than in watching his sister; there was something so bright and harmonious in her expression.

"No, I lived with the aunt who brought me up until she died, about eighteen months ago; and then Maurice and Janet invited me here. It was such a lovely little village in Dorsetshire where Aunt Emma lived, and her cottage was such a quaint black-timbered little place, quite smothered in roses!"

"What an awful change for you to come here!" ejaculated Dollie, with a solemnity that made the other laugh. "I don't think I could exist for a month in such a place; it must be so terribly trying always to have that sort of

spectacle before one's eyes," pointing to a group of ragged children playing before the house. Miss St. John put up her eyeglasses and inspected them.

"They are some of my scholars at the ragged schools; yes, one does have one's heart wrung very often, one is so sorry for the poor little creatures sometimes. If you could only see some of the homes that Maurice and I visit!"

"I should not like the work," confessed Dollie honestly.

"No, I daresay not; one must have a vocation for it. Maurice sometimes declares that I am cut out for a sister of charity, but I tell him he is wrong. I have too great a horror of rule and routine. I like my work to be stamped with my own individuality, and to do it in my own way."

"And you can be happy here!" with a gesture of surprise and pity.

"Yes, I can be happy even in Whitechapel," returned Miss St. John, much amused; "I think a good deal of work and a little love suffices for the lives of most women. I miss

my roses; but then there are the children a Maurice—and Janet too, of course," with little laugh over the omission; but she said with a change of tone that did not esca Dollie.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

"WHAT a charming family the St. Johns are," were Dollie's first words when she found herself alone again with her mother; and, in spite of her predisposition to reserve, Mrs. Maynard cordially endorsed her daughter's opinion.

The visit had been an entire success. Before they parted Miss St. John had promised to come over to Kensington in the ensuing week, and spend a long day with her new acquaintances. This passed off so satisfactorily that it was quite a matter of regret when her brother made his appearance in the evening to escort her home.

But he brought a message from his wife. The distance was too great for constant intercourse, but Mrs. St. John hoped Mrs. Maynard would allow her daughter to spend a

night with them; her sister-in-law had so few friends, and this would give them all the greatest pleasure.

Mrs. Maynard hesitated and looked dubious, but a glance at Dollie's eager face seemed to change her opinion, and with a slight effort that only Dollie noticed, the invitation was accepted.

"How good of you to spare me, mother!" exclaimed Dollie gratefully, when their visitors had gone.

"I saw you wanted to go, Dollie," was her mother's answer. She did not like to damp the girl's pleasure with a hint of her own dulness, and yet she was counting up the days as a miser does his gold—only a fortnight more and Dollie would be gone.

Dollie was far too enthusiastic about her new friends to spoil her enjoyment with these sort of thoughts; when the day came she set off in the highest spirits, carrying her little bag. Mrs. Maynard had some shopping to do in St. Paul's Churchyard, and insisted on accompanying her daughter to the very corner of Lime Street, as a novel short cut.

When they parted Dollie waved her hand and went on gaily, she had no idea that her mother was standing at the corner watching her.

"What a slim graceful figure she has, and how well she holds herself!" thought the poor mother fondly. "There is no one like my Dollie, and yet I suppose few people would call her beautiful; God bless her sweet face!" But perfectly unaware of all this admiration Dollie marched on straight and briskly, swinging her little bag.

Biddy received her full of smiles. She had the same bib-apron, and her arms were bare; nevertheless Dollie did not object to her so strongly as on the first occasion. "Miss Mary was out, but the Missis was in the dining-room; would the young lady walk in?" and Biddy took charge of her bag hospitably. The dining-room lay at the rear of the house—a long dull room with a shabby green wainscot, and two windows looking out on a small back yard.

The prospect was not enlivening: to the left were the blackened walls and many windows

of the sugar bakehouse; a dead wall closed the vista in front; a rugged ivy clung to the brickwork, and at its foot was a little flower border, full of nasturtiums and fuchsias, which went by the name of the children's garden.

The afternoon's sunshine flooded the room, bringing the shabby leather and faded hangings somewhat too prominently into relief. Mrs. St. John, who was sitting busily working at some childish garment, with Bee playing on the carpet at her feet, rose and welcomed her guest with evident cordiality.

She looked a little worn and haggard in the sunlight, but Dollie thought her handsomer than ever; her brown hair had ruddy gleams in it, and the shabby black dress seemed to fall round her in folds of antique simplicity. "I never saw beauty like hers, never," Dollie said afterwards to her mother; "and yet somehow it seems so wasted."

"Yes, she is very handsome, but in my opinion her good looks are marred by that dissatisfied, almost unhappy, expression; a very much plainer face would please me better;" and Dollie half owned her mother was right.

"Mary is down at the schools as usual, but she bade me give you her love, and say she will not be long," began Mrs. St. John, taking up her work again, when Dollie had kissed Bee and had seated herself. She was stitching with the air of a woman that had not a moment to lose, and Dollie felt a little oppressed. The idea of a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs St. John was rather formidable. She was willing to admire her from a distance, but to sit opposite to her and try to cudgel her brains for suitable topics for conversation was too much for her youthful shyness.

"Where are the children and Lettice?" she stammered; "may I go to them? I have brought them some pears and some roses; for you too if you would like them."

"Thank you; they are beautiful; and Mr. St. John is so passionately fond of flowers,"—and there was a quick gleam of pleasure in her dark eyes. She thought Dollie looked very fresh and dainty sitting there in her summer raiment. The grey gown, and the yellow hair, and the great crimson roses, made up quite a pretty picture. She was touched, too, by the

girl's thoughtfulness; and then the flowers would please Maurice.

"They are all in the next room learning their lessons. They have no governess; we could not afford such a luxury, but their father and I teach them. Lettice is almost entirely his pupil; she is quite a good Latin scholar for her age. I suppose it will be useful to her some day. We mean to bring them up to be independent, poor things!"

"I always think it a pity that girls should be so helpless. I mean to be an artist myself," said Dollie, who was a fair copyist, but had not a grain of real artistic talent in her composition. She was working hard for hours daily at the School of Design, and there was a small room at the top of the house in Abercrombie Road that was dignified by the name of Dollie's studio.

It was a mean little place enough, with an easel and a few plaster casts, and two or three unfinished sketches of rather mongrel-looking dogs; for Dollie had struck out an entirely fresh line, and had aspired lately to be an animal painter—a miniature Landseer or Rosa

Bonheur. She had already drawn the costermonger's donkey—a correct likeness, only rather askew; and the Newfoundland Leo, from next door had been bribed with frequent bones to more than one sitting. The sullen bear-like head was said to be a complete success by every one but Leo's master, though Mrs. Maynard secretly regretted this new and surprising ambition on her daughter's part.

"Yes, it is very like, Dollie; and yet there seems something wanting," Mrs. Maynard would say, cocking her head on one side like a critical sparrow, after the manner of inexperienced admirers, and trying hard to warm into enthusiasm over the donkey's stiff wooden legs; "oughtn't there to be a little more muscle and curve in that fore-leg, my dear? and I don't think—I am not sure—that the left hind leg is quite as it should be."

"If you are going to laugh at my donkey I shall turn him round to the wall," answered the young artist pettishly, suiting her action to her words; "it is so difficult to please people who don't understand. Susan said the man quite called out when he saw it."

"And what did he say, my dear?" asked her mother rather feebly, for this irritability of genius crushed her.

"Well, it was rather vulgar, of course:—'Dash me, if that aint Jemmy's thunderin' old self, and no mistake!' Susan said those were his very words, and that he hoped the young lady would finish her beautiful picture; and then he asked for some beer."

"Of course he could see it was a donkey!" returned Mrs. Maynard, rather indignant about the beer; but though she meant nothing by the remark Dollie thought it very cutting. "This is a donkey," she wrote underneath in very big fierce letters, and then she tore the paper in pieces. It was some time before Mrs. Maynard was invited into her daughter's studio. Mrs. St. John knew nothing about the donkey and the mongrel-looking dogs, so she listened to Dollie's announcement with perfect good faith. If she failed to enlarge on the subject it was because her mind naturally centred on her own interests and on her children.

"They have no beauty, poor things! and so

we must bring them up to be useful," she said, laying down her work with a sigh. Those four plain-faced little girls were sad crosses to the proud handsome mother, and then she snatched up her little Bee and covered her with kisses.

The children were learning their lessons in a large bare-looking room on the first floor, opposite the dining-room, that was sometimes called the schoolroom, and sometimes father's study; in appearance it was a shabby compound of both.

There was a large round table in the middle covered with an inky cloth; a handsome bureau and writing-table stood in opposite corners; a small bookcase of choice theological books fronted one filled with childish school-books; a linnet chirped in a small green cage; there were wire blinds, and some pots of homely musk in the windows. A street crier was vending cheap fish in the distance. The children, in their holland pinafores, and with rough flaxen heads, were huddled together rather closely at the table. The youngest, May, was crying; Lettice was crouched up as

usual with her elbows on the table. They all looked up a little scared as their mother swept into the room followed by Miss Maynard. In Dollie's eyes the whole group had a somewhat forlorn appearance.

"What is this? May, leave off crying directly and tell me." Mrs. St. John spoke rather severely—she was evidently a rigid disciplinarian; but Lettice interposed somewhat eagerly.

"It is nothing, mamma; please do not ask. May will be all right directly."

"But I want an answer, Lettice;" and Mrs. St. John's voice took its harshest chords.

"May was naughty and would not learn her lessons," interposed Rosie; "and when Lettie scolded her, she got the ruler and thumped Lettie, and she had a headache and it made it worse. Knocks aren't good for headaches," added Rosie with a wise air.

"But May was so sorry, mamma, and she gave me such lots of kisses to make the place well," broke in Lettice. "You need not make the worst of it, Rosie; there is no good in doing that. Hatty knows that May is sorry."

"Yes, but she was very naughty," repeated Rosie, who was given to harp on one idea.

"It is always so when I leave you in charge of the children, Lettice," was the severe reply. "Let me look at your forehead,"—pushing back the rough hair with fingers that were not over-gentle. "May, how could you be so excessively naughty?" as a large black bruise came to light, and Lettice in spite of her efforts winced at her mother's touch. "Fetch me the arnica, Hatty, and some cold water; she has had a dreadful knock."

"I did not mean it, and the ruler was so hard," sobbed the little culprit, "and Lettie said she would forgive me."

"But I have not forgiven you for hurting your sister," returned her mother dryly. "Go up into the nursery, May, and stay there by yourself. Miss Maynard has brought some pears for good children, but I could not think of giving you your share. I shall tell your father when he comes in. I do not know what he will say when he hears that in spite of your promise you have given way to your temper again."

"Oh, mamma, please do not tell father," pleaded Lettice, when May had withdrawn from the room with a fresh burst of sobs. "Poor May is really sorry; she kissed me ever so many times, and telling father will be her worst punishment."

"How can I bathe your head if you do not keep still?" returned her mother in a very unpromising voice. "If your head still aches you had better put away your books, and lie down on the sofa a little. Hatty, clear away Lettice's books, and make the table tidy."

"And you will not tell father," repeated Lettice, leaning her aching head gratefully against her mother's arm.

"I shall do as I have said," replied Mrs. St. John coldly, and she drew herself a little away. "I daresay the fault was yours as much as May's; I gave you the charge of the children's lessons, and of course you had got to your Latin again—there, I will not hear another word." And poor Lettice with tears in her eyes was obliged to be silent.

"Do let me stay with them, and help them to finish their lessons," interposed Dollie, as

Mrs. St. John prepared to leave the room; "I am so fond of teaching, and I never have any practice;" and her hostess assented somewhat ungraciously,—to tell the truth, she wanted Dollie's society for herself, for a visitor was a rare treat in that homely household.

The children looked a little shy and frightened when they found themselves alone with a stranger—Lettice was wiping furtive tears away in her sofa corner, and Hatty and Rosie were fidgeting on their seats. "Now let me do something for somebody," began Dollie in her bright, chirping voice; but at that moment the door opened, and a brown hat and then a laughing face were thrust into the room.

"Aunt Mary—Oh, dear Aunt Mary, do come here!" exclaimed Lettice joyfully, sitting up and dashing away her tears.

"Let me speak to my visitor first. How do you do, Miss Maynard; I have been detained at the schools, but I hope Janet and the children have been good to you. Now, my pet, what do these tears mean, and what makes you look so pale?" and Miss St. John

placed herself on the floor by the sofa, and tossed off her shady hat.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, such a dreadful thing has happened," began Lettice with a sort of gasp. "May has been in a temper again, and mamma means to tell father" (Dollie discovered the children generally called Mrs. St. John mamma, but the father always remained father). "I begged her over and over not to do so—didn't I, Hatty?—but she said May must be well punished."

"Humph!" ejaculated Aunt Mary; "somebody else is punished too, I can see. Let me hear all about it, Lettie." And Lettice began her dismal recital.

Such a jumble of childish facts and feelings! Lettice had to do her Latin translation for father—only mamma never would understand that she was not doing it for pleasure—it made her head ache it was so difficult; and then Hatty could not do her sums, and she cried over them for fear mamma might be angry; and May shook the table, and spoilt her ciphering-book—such a great blot of ink! and then Hatty was cross and pushed May;

and after that nothing was right. "We were all wrong together, I believe," groaned the poor little pupil-governess, "and the worst of it all is, mamma believes that my carelessness is at the bottom of it."

"My dear Lettice," began Aunt Mary solemnly, "once upon a time a very wise man said, 'Give a dog a bad name and hang him;'" and then she flashed a bright look of fun across to Dollie. "Oh dear, the wisdom of those ancients! Hark! is not that your father's footstep, children? I have a wonderful idea; suppose we tell him ourselves—so much depends on the way of telling. Maurice, come here. Lettice and I have something we want you to know." And Mr. St. John, shaking hands heartily with his guest, came hastily across to the sofa.

The result was like sunshine after a storm. Mr. St. John stroked Lettice's hair, without speaking and then stooped over and kissed her, and five minutes afterwards his long legs were striding upstairs.

At tea-time he made his appearance leading May by the hand. Her hair was nicely brushed,

and all traces of tears had disappeared from her face, which was dimpling with smiles. "Now run round the table and kiss your mother," whispered her father, and May obeyed.

Mrs. St. John took the kiss very coldly, but though she looked displeased, she made no remark; she was strict with her children, and it was hard to say whether the little girls most feared or loved her—all but Lettice, who adored her mother.

Her husband's leniency was opposed to her sense of justice. When she punished, it was for due cause, and any remittance of such punishment was impossible to her. But she was a woman given to bear her own grievances silently, and not for worlds would she hint before the children that she thought their father was wrong. From her he should always have wifely subservience and honour.

But Maurice, looking across the table with his honest eyes, saw from his wife's face that she was displeased, and at once made overtures for conciliation.

"You look tired, Janet," he said tenderly; "these troublesome children have put you out;

eh, May?"—laying in her plate the luscious portion of a pear peeled by his own hand. I am sorry to say May did not look at her mother for permission, but gobbled up the forbidden dainty as fast as she could.

"I am not specially tired, Maurice," returned his wife, her voice as usual softening at his lightest word.

"All the same you look as though some fresh air would do you good. We have service in the schoolroom to-night; supposing you put on your bonnet, and come with me; you have not walked with me for weeks."

"Shall you be alone?" asked Janet in a tone of suppressed eagerness. No happiness on earth seemed so great to her as a quiet stroll through the deserted streets, leaning on her husband's arm or close to him, touching him and listening to his low-toned talk. In the moonlight, or underneath the wintry starlight, her heart had enjoyed such deep quiet communing with his, that the dim narrow streets had been forgotten, and it might have been that they twain were walking in paradise.

"Shall you be alone, Maurice?" she asked; and her eyes began to shine with pleasure.

"Well, young Inman will be here presently, and as he is going to sea shortly, I think we ought to ask him to accompany us—there is so much depending on a lad's last impressions."

"Well, no, thank you. I think I must stop at home to-night and put the children to bed; Biddy is busy, and Aunt Mary has her visitor; indeed I would rather not to-night," as Mary and her husband seemed disposed to argue the matter; and her tone was so decided that Maurice said no more.

That he was disappointed was evident from the grave way in which he turned and addressed himself to his guest; and the moment the meal was over, he shut himself up in his study; Young Inman joined him there, and after a time the two went out—the boy talking earnestly and Maurice listening. As they passed the house he looked up and saw his wife watching him, and lifted his felt hat with rather a sweet sad smile.

"You might have come with me," it seemed

to say to her; "you have sent me out to my work as usual, weary and discouraged, when your presence would have cheered me."

"Come children, it is bed-time," said the mother sharply; "bid Miss Maynard good-night." And as they trooped past her like a little flock of frightened sheep, Dollie in her heart felt very sorry for them; they seemed such good obedient children in every one's but the mother's eyes.

"I wish Janet would have let me do it as usual," said Mary thoughtfully, as she took up her work; "she makes such a grave matter of the whole business, and when I am there it seems only like a game of romps;" and she listened somewhat anxiously to the childish footsteps overhead.

"I have forgotten my thimble," said Dollie, when half an hour had passed, and she still sat chattering and looking down idly on the street below; the window was opened, but a lamp was burning softly on the middle table.

"Let me fetch it," returned her friend.

"No, thank you, I shall find it more quickly myself;" and she ran nimbly upstairs. In reach-

ing the chamber allotted to her she had to pass the children's room; the door was opened, and Dollie ventured to peep in. Mrs. St. John was sitting with Bee in her lap, trying to soothe her to sleep with some childish hymn. Rosie, who had been found guilty of some trifling misdemeanour, was sobbing heavily on her pillow, and Lettice was leaning on her elbow trying to comfort her.

The sight of Bee in her little night-dress, with her bare rosy feet and bright tangle of curls, as she joined drowsily in her mother's hymn, was too irresistible to a child-lover like Dollie, and in another moment she had made her entrance boldly.

"There's a home for little children," sang Janet in her deep voice, "above the bright blue sky." "Hush, Baby, don't sing; you must go to sleep.

"No home on earth is like it,
Nor can with it compare,
For every one is happy,
Nor can be happier there."

"Do naughty gells go there, mother?" asked Bee, rousing up a little.

"Naughty girls? of course not; hush, you

must not interrupt mother;" and Janet resumed her crooning song.

"There's a crown for little children
Above the bright blue sky."

But Baby was not to be silenced.

"'Oo won't have no 'eavens or no crowns," cried Bee, pointing her finger with fiendish delight at Rosie, who was still sobbing drearily; "no, no, 'eavens, or 'omes, or crowns—will she, mother?" and Bee fell to counting her toes with a satisfied air.

"Yes, Rosie will go to heaven, if she leaves off crying, and is a good girl always," returned Janet, whose maternal heart yearned a little to dry Rosie's tears; and Rosie's shoulders ceased heaving quite so violently under the bed-clothes. "Dear me, Miss Maynard, is that you standing in the dark? you will think my children are always crying."

"Never mind, 'Osie, don't kye any more, and Bee will love you, and give you lots of 'omes," and Bee put out her chubby arm and patted the bed-clothes with friendly magnanimity, and Janet, kissing both her and Rosie softly, put her darling back in her crib.

CHAPTER V.

THE LION D'OR.

THE ensuing weeks passed over quickly, and the day came when Dollie stood on the edge of a new world; and indeed this phrase savoured of little exaggeration in Dollie's case, who had seldom from her infancy slept out of the little white bed that stood in the corner of her mother's room. The bed would be vacant now for many a long week, the widow sadly thought, as she lay counting the hours during the whole of the dreary night before Dollie's departure. The room would feel strangely empty when she woke in the moonlight, and saw no golden hair shed over the pillow. What youthful innocent dreams had come to the girl as she lay smiling in her sleep? Good health, a fine digestion, and an easy-going conscience had made life pleasant enough to

Dollie. Would it ever come to her to feel the pains and penalties of less fortunate mortals, to experience the temptations and conflicts, the pitiless storms and terrors of life. "Ah, God forbid!" thought the poor mother fondly; she had opened her arms wide with maternal self-sacrifice, and her child had escaped from them into the wide unknown world; and so to her darling the battle of life had begun.

Dollie herself had no such misgivings; she was a little sobered, perhaps a trifle saddened, at the thought of this first long parting from her mother, but the youthful Eve was too strong in her; the desire for knowledge, for excitement, for new faces, and new scenes, was too passionately inherent in her nature to be quenched by mere affectionate considerations; a sort of intoxication, a vague dreaminess, half inexplicable, and wholly delicious, seemed to throb and dilate within her, as they drove through the dark autumnal streets to the wharf.

Mrs. Reid's plans for her protégées were a little misty and involved, and had changed more than once; at the last moment they were

bidden to take the lengthy route by Basseville. "It will be a twelve hours' voyage," she wrote, "but to such young travellers this will not matter. Miss Morell has some important business to transact for me in Basseville, and she will meet our young friends, and will, I hope, make a few hours' sojourn in the place pleasant to them; she will then escort them to Lesponts; after all, this seems the best plan to me;" and in this the girls cordially acquiesced.

The drive from Kensington was a long one, but to Dollie everything was delightful; she liked driving through the dark streets holding her mother's hand, and looking up at the lighted windows. By-and-by they came to a piece out of fairy-land. Could the Arabian Nights' Entertainments furnish anything more wonderful and enchanting than the Thames Embankment, with its marvellous illumination, its soft moving lights, and the dark river flashing in the distance. Dollie squeezed her mother's hand, and gasped out little sentences of delight and rapturous admiration. Was this London, busy matter-of-fact London? Had

some enchanter waved his wand and lit up those mystic lamps, and touched those soft distances. "Beautiful! oh, mother, how beautiful!" cried Dollie.

She gave quite a sigh of regret when all the glitter faded into darkness again; by-and-by came crowded thoroughfares, then narrow streets. All at once they stopped; a door opened in a wall; there was a short man with a lantern, who guided them down a dark mysterious path; another man popped his head out of a little window and asked their names; there was a drawbridge; a group of men surrounded it; an expanse of black water, and a bridge over which people were looking. "This is our wharf, and there is Mr. St. John waiting to help you into the vessel. Make haste, Dollie," said her mother; and Dollie moved forward in a dream.

"I thought we were in some one's backyard; and you call this a great London wharf!" exclaimed Dollie, turning critical in her excitement.

"But look what a nice, clean little vessel it is," rejoined Miss St. John cheerfully, walking

up to meet them. "Maurice and I have been all over it—there is such a nice weather-beaten old captain in a fur cap—and, do you know, we are the only lady passengers. The lady's cabin is small, but delightfully cosy, though it does smell rather of oil; but you must come and see it for yourself;" and Dollie obeyed, nothing loth.

She was in the humour to be pleased with everything. The cabin was a little close; but then they had already made up their minds to stay on board after the survey. They all stood in a group watching idly. There were some flat-bottomed barges drawn up by the vessels; some men were flinging horns into the hold. The air was filled with sharp sounds — some miserable-looking Italians—men, women, and children—were shivering on a heap of jute bags. They looked up at the sound of Dollie's laugh. One of the men had a hurdy-gurdy, and grinned back at her with glistening white teeth; a brown-faced baby began to cry, and was hushed with a dry crust.

"Poor things! they are going to France with their summer earnings," said Mr. St. John

compassionately. Before he left he had said a few words to them in tolerable Italian.

"Si senor; yes, yes, we leave the England, and go back farther south. Yes, the winter is cold, and one must get warm and not starve;" and the man showed his white teeth still more, and ground at his hurdy-gurdy.

"We must go ashore; come, Mrs. Maynard, let me take care of you."

"Good-bye, Miss Maynard; good-bye, Aunt Mary; we shall miss you dreadfully."

"Is it time to go?" whispered Dollie; her arms were round her mother's neck. She had last words, a thousand fond charges, to give. "Take care of yourself, do take care of yourself, darling mother, and don't fret."

Mrs. Maynard said very little in reply. When Mr. St. John called to her again, she put her girl's arms away from her. "God bless you, my dear!" she said; and then she climbed slowly on shore.

Dollie could see her for a long time waving a white hand in the distance. "Poor mother, I wish she could have come too!" sighed Dollie; and she felt very sad for a long time.

But Miss St. John's cheerfulness soon roused her. When they came into the open sea, Mary fetched a rug, and covered up herself and Dollie. How she talked and laughed!—the man at the wheel heard her singing snatches of songs in the starlight. Towards dawn, as they grew drowsy and chilly, they crept down into the cabin, and fell fast asleep in their youthful weariness.

Dollie, who was unaccustomed to vigils, slept the longest. It was nearly noon when Miss St. John woke her.

"Come, come, you lazy girl; we are just entering the harbour, and it is such a pretty sight!—Sunday morning too, and such a bright sunshiny morning!" cried Mary cheerfully.

Was it Sunday morning, and could her mother really be at church without her? Dollie thought, with fresh wonder, as she climbed up the companion-ladder, and stood on deck.

How strange and foreign it all looked! They were steaming up to an unknown land between great wooden piers and vessels of every size. Everything seemed painted in blues and reds — blue blouses seemed everywhere;

figures with red and yellow epaulettes, with blue trousers striped with red; groups of women—bonnes—and fishwives with white caps and gold earrings, strolled down by the water.

Dollie thought it all very odd and picturesque. The bright sunshine shone on the quay; little white low cabarets and estaminets, with jalousies and brightly-painted names, came in sight. Then came more blouses—a soft tone of blue seemed everywhere; the movement, the light, the colouring, the brown faces, the shrill foreign tones, filled Dollie with ecstasy.

"Voici les douaniers and la douane," exclaimed one garçon in shrill civility. "Venez, mes demoiselles, vous voudrez un facteur pour transporter vos colis; vos bagages seront visités dans quelques minutes."

"Tenez, garçon! laissez les demoiselles à moi, s'il vous plaît," interposed soft feminine tones; "et bien, Pierre, ayez soin de ne pas froisser les effets de ces dames Anglaises;" and a little blue-eyed woman, scarcely as youthful of aspect as of dress, came running up to the bewildered girls, holding out a pair of little gloved hands.

"Which is which? I cannot tell, not I. One of you must be Miss St. John, and one Miss Maynard. Of course you know who I am. I am Charlotte Morell, Mrs. Reid's step-niece," began the little woman volubly, holding a hand of each. "Are you very tired? Has the voyage been very disagreeable? have you experienced the 'mal de mer'? I always say 'mal de mer,' the English word is so unpleasant. No—ah well! you look as fresh as roses. Now we must follow Pierre to the douane; have you anything to declare?" and without waiting for an answer, their new acquaintance led them rapidly to a sort of shed or outhouse, where she was soon engaged in a good-natured wrangling with a group of gesticulating men.

She came back to them by-and-by, flushed and smiling, and handed them their bags.

"Pierre is so stupid! I told ma Tante I could manage better without him; this delay is very disagreeable; don't you think so? but it is over now. After all, it was a mere matter of form; one man peeps, and then hands you your bag with a 'Merci, madame.' These con-

traventions—these regulations, I mean—are very barbarous, they belong to the dark ages. Now we shall soon be at the hotel, and then you can rest yourselves. I have ordered coffee and pistolets in your bedroom, as table d'hôte will not be ready for hours. We are going to spend all to-morrow at Basseville, as I have not half finished les affaires de ma tante. Shall you be bored? do the arrangements please you? tell me frankly, both of you." And Miss Morell paused, perhaps for want of breath, and the opportunity was seized eagerly by Mary, who, by right of priority of age, generally acted as spokeswoman. She assured Miss Morell that they were perfectly satisfied with the arrangements, and were quite sure of amusing themselves.

"That is right. I do love people who are agreeable and make the best of everything. You are so different to some visitors we entertained lately;" and Miss Morell broke into a series of breathless anecdotes relating to a person or persons unknown.

I am afraid the girls did not listen much; they exchanged glances of amusement as their

unconscious companion trotted on between them, airing her little graces of conversation for their benefit. On the whole, they were not prepared to dislike her, though her volubility might prove a source of weariness. There was something innocent and good-natured in her very silliness.

Charlotte Morell was one of that numerous class of women who refuse to grow old gracefully, who cling to youth with a fond pertinacity, which is at once sad and useless.

She had been very pretty and young and artless once, and she was bent on retaining these charms now; only somehow the prettiness was faded, and the artlessness a mistake.

Her figure was still charming, rounded, with soft outlines, while other women often grow angular or over-stout at forty; and the blue eyes and dimples were still there, and Charlotte's dimples had always been so admired.

And so Miss Morell still smiled a good deal, and still opened her eyes in the old effective manner, and decked her little person in youthful fineries, in wonderful gowns, which scarcely matched the sharp, faded cheeks.

"If she would only wear a black silk dress, and a little lace cap—her hair is so thin—she would look quite a pretty woman still," Dollie said that very evening, when she was left alone with her friend. Miss Morell had joined them at table d'hôte in an elaborate toilet. Her little hands sparkled with hoops of rubies and emeralds and diamonds. The golden tinge had faded out of her hair; it looked colourless in the gas-light. When Charlotte waved her hands, as she did continually, with all sorts of little Frenchified shrugs, the gems seemed to blaze quite a mimic fire of red and green; the delicate wrists were weighted with massive fetters. Charlotte had a perfect passion for jewels; a great deal of her slender income was spent in adding to her collection. In vain Mrs. Reid argued and scolded. Charlotte was a butterfly by nature, and would paint her wings.

"The wonder was," Dollie said, "how any sensible person could live with her." But in this she afterwards owned herself a little severe. In spite of her fripperies and her gew-gaws, her want of reticence and her unconscious mischief-making, Charlotte was a good little soul in her way.

She had loved once, as most women do in their lives, and had been true to her lover after she had lost him. "He was in the charge at Balaklava, my dear, and was the handsomest, the bravest, and best officer in the whole of the British army," Charlotte would say, in an odd little choked voice, when she recounted this unfortunate episode in her life. All her friends knew about it. From time to time, when she could secure a new listener, Charlotte would repeat the whole story, crying softly over it all the time. The pain and the loss had been very great at one time, no doubt, but it could not be denied that Miss Morell contrived to extract a great deal of enjoyment out of the recital of her miseries.

It was a sure passport to sympathy, an unfailing source of interest; but after a time people grew tired of the never-ending story. Perhaps they had had their own love troubles, and had endured them more stoically, and were ready to blame such excessive want of reticence. After all, if Captain Hervey had lived, he might have grown weary of his sweetheart: Charlotte's blue eyes, and china bloom

could hardly have satisfied a sensible man when he found out her giddiness and want of ballast; and if so, better a dead lover than a dying love or an ill-matched marriage.

Both the girls were somewhat relieved when they turned at last into the courtyard of the Lion d'Or, and two smiling French chambermaids ushered them into a great, airy front room, with two windows looking down on the narrow street.

Dollie uttered a little cry of ecstasy; she had never slept in such a gorgeous room before. There were four crimson velvet arm-chairs; a mirror, with a gilded clock; a round table stood in the middle of the room; there was a shining wardrobe, and a cheval-glass, wherein Dollie's slim figure was reflected; two tent beds, with sweeping white draperies were on opposite sides of the door; the windows looked on to a café. As Dollie looked out, a garçon, with a white napkin under his arm, appeared on a balcony opposite.

Two priests in long shovel-hats went down the street; a fair-haired bonne, with white streamers floating over her shoulders, passed

with two little boys in frilled trousers; and then a soldier, with red epaulettes and a fiercely curling moustache, went into the café.

When table d'hôte was over, and Miss Morell had betaken herself to her room, to write some important letters, as she told them, Dollie and her friend ensconced themselves cosily at the open window. The windows of the café were blazing with lights now; dark figures crossed and recrossed before them; in the dusky streets below there were still groups and knots of people; some of them went in to the épicier in front.

"Poor little mother! she has just returned from evening church, and is sitting down to her solitary supper," sighed Dollie; and then she glanced round her at the gleaming mirrors, and the lofty room, and the great festoons of sweeping draperies, and a pleasant sense of contrast came over her.

"Yes, indeed," echoed Mary, with another sigh; "and Janet is putting the children to bed now, and singing to Bee. How I wish I could transport them all here! how Janet and Lettice would enjoy this place!"

Mary wished it still more on the following afternoon when they were sitting on the low sandhills at Lisse.

All the morning, while Miss Morell had been engaged with "les affaires de ma Tante," as she repeated more than once, the girls had wandered about the quaint little town. Its brightness and cleanliness impressed them favourably; without being beautiful or picturesque, it had a certain homely pleasantness of its own, like a plain face with a smile on it.

They looked at the park—a somewhat shabby affair—with a lime walk and a small round pond, like a large basin, where some children were sailing a small boat, while their bonne sat and knitted a grey stocking under the trees. Then they looked at the cathedral, with its tower opposite and the road dividing it. It was very dark and still; two or three women knelt before the tawdry little altars; that of Notre Dame des Lourdes was covered with small votive offerings. Dollie looked on impressed and wondering, as an old market-woman, with a brown, shrivelled face and great copper earrings, laid aside her basket and

knelt devoutly on the pavements. "How her poor old bones must ache!" thought Dollie compassionately. It was strange to go out of the coolness and the darkness again into the sunny crowded streets.

After déjeuner, Charlotte proposed they should take the train and go down to Lisse. It was only a ten-minutes' drive, she said, and it would be so cool and pleasant on the sea-shore.

It was an odd lonely little place, the girls thought; the casino, with its green jalousies, was closed for the season, and so were les bains. There were very few signs of habitation; some soldiers were shooting among the sandhills. When they were finished, some boys came climbing up among the bushes and rank grass, hunting for bullets.

The yellow sands stretched out into the far distance; a grey-blue sea rippled slowly and softly on the shore; myriads of faintly-tinted shells—yellow and pink and cream-coloured—lay under their feet; there were dark patches of seaweed on the sandhills; there were coarse lilac flowers, with a strange, sickly smell;

everywhere, far as eye could reach, was rank vegetation, mounds of yellow sands, and the smooth, waveless sea.

"Now let us rest," exclaimed Miss Morell, when the girls were weary of collecting shells. Aunt Mary had already stored up a goodly heap of the fairy treasures for the future delight of May and Hatty and Rosie; and Dorothy had generously contributed to the stock. A soft wind blew freshly over their faces; the water rippled on with faint splashings and washings on the sand; a purple shadow lay in the distance. It was an afternoon for vague dreams and musings; but Miss Morell thought otherwise.

"Do let us rest and have a chat," she said, unfastening her smart little hat with its red poppies. "I have been so busy all the morning that I have not had time to ask you a question. Do you know I have been comparing you two together all the afternoon, and I cannot make out which of you will please 'ma Tante' the most."

"Is Mrs. Reid really your aunt?" asked Mary, who had her own doubts on the subject.

Charlotte looked a little confused. "Not exactly. Mr. Reid's sister married a Mr. Morell, a widower, and I was his daughter."

"Then you were not even related to him," began Mary in a matter-of-fact way; but Charlotte interrupted her rather pettishly.

"Dear me, how very accurate you seem to be, Miss St. John! When one lives with a person one does not care to be formal. 'Mrs. Reid' was too stiff, so I call her 'ma Tante,' or 'auntie,' sometimes, as a sort of pet-name; you are very English, you two. I was going to propose that we should drop all formality; it is so absurd among women; no one calls me anything but Charlotte; and it is so embarrassing to say Miss Maynard and Miss St. John every minute."

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Mary heartily, who saw she had somehow hurt their companion's feelings. "Come, Dollie, shall we make a bargain?" and Dollie smiled assent.

"All the same, I am very curious to know what impression you will make on our chatelaine," continued Miss Morell, who had a knack of bringing up the same subject again;

"so much depends in this case on first impressions."

"Why in this case, and not in every case?" asked Dollie innocently.

"Humph!" observed Charlotte, affecting a more mysterious and reserved manner. "I do not think I am quite at liberty to divulge what I mean, but all the same you will find my hint useful. You know my cousins the Lyndhursts, of course," turning to Mary rather abruptly.

To Dollie's surprise, she flushed up a little as she answered, "Oh yes, she knew them; they had been to Lime Street several times, but not lately. Maurice liked them, and so did Janet—but were they really Charlotte's cousins?" she observed, a little timidly, perhaps for fear of another rebuff.

Charlotte laughed rather affectedly. "Ahem! ma Tante's belongings are somewhat involved. You are only a second cousin of Mr. Reid's, I believe, or cousin once removed—I never can understand how it is. Well, Grey and his brother stand in much the same relation; we are very distantly related, but they always

call me Cousin Charlotte—Bertie especially. Do you know they are coming to Lesponts the end of this week;" and again Dollie noticed that Mary gave a slight start.

"No, I did not know it. I have not seen them lately," she answered in a low voice.

"Yes, Grey has been ill from over-study, and needs a change, and Bertie's pupil has gone abroad with his parents; so they are coming down together; it will make your visit more lively, will it not?"

"But who are they? I have never heard of them," asked Dollie curiously. Mary was sorting her shells, and made no attempt at enlightening her; but Charlotte was more ready with an answer.

"Well, as I told you, they were distant connections of Mr. Reid, and you must know that ma Tante has been hunting up all his belongings for the last two or three years; ever since poor Walter—but I forgot, I will not touch on that now. Well, the Lyndhursts were invited, and we made their acquaintance. Bertie was my favourite, but I think ma Tante had a secret preference for Grey; not that she

took greatly to either of them. I think poor Walter—I mean, she seems to prefer girls now." And then Charlotte came to a full stop suddenly, but neither Mary nor Dollie seemed to observe her confusion.

"Are they young?" inquired Dollie, it must be confessed with a great deal of interest; she had never known any young man intimately, and she thought Bertie especially sounded nice.

"Perhaps Bertie, or Cuthbert, as he is called sometimes, may be two- or three-and-twenty; his brother is three years older. The worst of it is they are very poor, and have rather a struggling life of it; they have both been to the university, but that was before they lost their father. Grey is reading for the Bar, and has pupils; he is very hard-working and clever, and will get on in time, I daresay. But Bertie is not doing so well; he has a tutorship somewhere in Warwickshire, but one can't help feeling that is not much."

"But it will lead to something," observed Mary softly. "Maurice says he is full of capability."

"Yes, but he is lacking in application or perseverance—at least so Mrs. Reid says; she is a very acute observer of human nature. But, girls, it is growing late, and we must be *en route* for the Lion d'Or, or we shall lose table d'hôte; come." And Charlotte, who had a keen appreciation of the good things of this life, hurried her reluctant companions from their nest in the sandhills, and led the way rapidly home.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE CHATEAU.

It was quite late on the afternoon of the following day when Miss Morell announced that "les affaires de ma Tante" were at last settled, and that she had ordered the fiacre to take them to the station. It was already dusk when they left Basseville; and before long a complete obscurity veiled the unlovely Flemish landscape from their eyes—the monotonous flats of low-lying lands, with their dykes and windmills and rows of pollards. A general sleepiness and want of animation pervaded everything; the train steamed on in melancholy slowness, as though time in Flanders were of no object. Every now and then they stopped at clean, deserted-looking stations. Once two sisters of charity got in. Their large

frames and coarse Flemish faces reminded Dorothy of a Dutch picture she had seen.

It was nearly nine before they found themselves in the large rambling station at Lesponts—"much too late to see anything," as Dollie observed regretfully. A few dark quiet streets, without a single foot-passenger, were soon passed, and then they turned into a long avenue. The night-air blew rather coldly in at the open window, fanning Dollie's eager face somewhat roughly. The dead leaves whirled under the horse's feet; some iron gates stood wide open; Dollie caught sight of a gravelled courtyard planted thickly with shrubs, with a high irregular house with a peaked red roof and yellow walls, over which the moon was shining; then the door opened, and in another moment they were all standing in a large dimly-lighted hall, with black and white tesselated pavement, a close stove and swinging lamp, with oak benches and cabinets. A staircase of slippery oak led to another still more dimly-lighted hall or lobby.

Two good-natured stolid-looking girls came out to receive them. Miss Morell spoke

rapidly to one of them in an undertone; and then she passed her arm through Mary's, and beckoned to Dorothy to follow.

"Ursula says ma Tante has had a bad day, and has not yet left her apartment. Come, I will show you to your rooms, and Romany shall bring you some coffee and help you to unpack. Romany speaks English, and so does Ursula. In fact, we pride ourselves on being an English household, and having English comforts. For example, you can have tea instead of coffee, and fancy yourself back in the land of fogs and roast-beef again. See, there are your rooms quite at the end of this corridor. They open into each other, which will be company for you when the wind howls round the chateau. Come, do you find your new quarters satisfactory?" finished Charlotte, in her airy, breathless way.

"They are charming," responded the girls warmly. And indeed both the rooms had a cheerful, comfortable aspect, with their dark waxed floor and square of gay-coloured carpet, their white tent-beds, heaped with snowy pillows, French windows with narrow festoons of

pink and white drapery; while a small crimson couch and round table, with a vase of flowers, stood before each close stove.

One of the stoves had been opened, and a snug little fire burned in the grate; a coffee equipage stood on the little round table, and Romany had drawn up two inviting arm-chairs; the silver sconces yielded a soft light; a black bearskin rug lay before the stove; the dark purple china and gleam of silver made a bright spot of colour in the room. Dollie's face dimpled with satisfaction as she surveyed the little preparations for their comfort. "How Janet would delight in all this luxury!" sighed Mary, who never seemed to enjoy any pleasure perfectly unless she could share it with others. "She used to describe this sort of thing to me. The Chateau de St. Aubert was a sort of earthly paradise to poor Janet."

"Why do you always sigh when you speak of Mrs. St. John," asked Dollie, a little curiously. She was leaning back luxuriously among the red cushions of her chair; her little feet rested on the black rug; both the girls were in their dark travelling dresses; Dollie's slim graceful

figure and fair hair showed to advantage in it. Mary was stouter, and had no special grace of outline; but she was fresh-looking, and had a thoroughly English look.

"Hush!" interrupted Mary cautiously, "I thought I heard footsteps in the next room. One must be careful in a strange place."

"Nonsense, it is only Romany unpacking our clothes," returned lazy Dollie. "When I am at home my mother does all those things for me. It must be a dreadful thing to have to wait on oneself, as you do, Mary."

Mary laughed in an amused manner, but she did not answer; and in another moment a light tap was heard at the door, and Mary's cheerful "Come in" was answered by the noiseless entry of a tall grey-haired woman.

Dollie rose to her feet in a startled way, but Mary only smiled again, and did not seem in the least disturbed by the abrupt entrance of their hostess.

"Good evening, my dears," said Mrs. Reid, kissing the girls lightly on either cheek, and pressing their hands kindly. "I thought it

better to introduce myself like this. Let me look at you both, and see if I can guess your identity: this must be Dorothy, I think, from her mother's description. And, yes"—turning to Mary, and scrutinising the bright face rather closely—"this must be the Aunt Mary who is every one's right hand, and who never thinks of herself. You see I am no mean physiognomist, and I am annotating Maurice, who is surely a good authority."

"I am not so sure of that; brothers are often partial," protested Mary, with an honest blush. "Are you so certain of your identification, Mrs. Reid. Suppose, after all, I am Dorothy Maynard."

"No, no, here is the veritable widow's mite —Margaret's one ewe-lamb," replied Mrs. Reid, with a sad smile; and again she put her hand kindly on the girl's shoulder. "She was good to spare you to me for a little, though I wish she could have come herself too. Ah well, one understands all that sort of thing—the sympathies do not narrow with age, thank God for that! You are both very welcome, my dears. It was kind of you to come to me; it

is long since I have seen two such young happy faces in my home."

"I think it is good of you to have us. You must not thank us for coming," broke out Dollie in her impulsive fashion, and then she waxed red and shy. Mrs. Reid only answered with one of her faint smiles, and stood warming her thin hands by the fire, and looking at them both with a scrutinising gravity which somehow made Dollie feel uncomfortable. Mary did not seem to notice it. She only drew another arm-chair closer to the stove, and motioned to her hostess to seat herself.

"Do not let me disturb you; you looked so comfortable, and you were chatting so busily, that I did not like interrupting you. Well, if you will let me share your fireside for a few minutes —but I must not keep Charlotte waiting;" and then she sank into the chair somewhat wearily, and lapsed into thoughtfulness.

Dollie returned her scrutiny with interest; unconsciously she had formed in her own mind a fancied ideal of the young Aunt Isabel whom her mother had described. She would find her old and changed, of course, but still beautiful;

those sort of lovely Madonna faces never grow plain.

The reality was a sort of shock to the girl's young enthusiasm. Keener eyes would still have traced the remains of great beauty in the still fine features; but Dollie's inexperience only noticed the sickly aged look and grey hair.

"Aunt Reid is the most singular-looking person," wrote Dollie the next day to her mother; "I am sure you would not recognise her in the least; and her peculiar style of dress adds to the singularity of her appearance. Charlotte says she never varies it either winter or summer; she always wears the same black clinging sort of dress, morning and evening, with some sort of black lace scarf draped oddly round her neck—not a scrap of white anywhere, not an ornament except her wedding ring, and yet she is so rich! Fancy all that blackness, with no relief but her pale face and silvery-grey hair. Mary and I say we have never seen such hair before, so thick and rich and silvery!"

"You are quite right; Mrs. Reid has certainly been very lovely, and is still almost

beautiful," wrote Mary at the same time to her brother Maurice. "There is a picture of the Mater Dolorosa in the churchwarden's room at St. Sauveurs, erroneously ascribed to Jan van Eyck, which reminds me most irresistibly of her face, and yet the features are not at all the same.

"One sees at a glance that she has been a great sufferer. The eyes have a hollowed melancholy look about them; now and then they have a wild, almost startled, expression. Perhaps her mouth is a little too thin and stern, but on the whole she looks gentle. Dollie seems in great awe of her, and seems to wonder that I do not share it. After what Charlotte has told us, I can feel nothing but interest and profound pity. What a tongue this little person has!"

A strange conversation was lingering in both the girls' minds as they wrote. Mrs. Reid had sat with them about half an hour, but the talk had been disconnected. Now and then she dropped some kindly word, or questioned them about some home interest; but she was evidently a reserved woman, and

silence was perhaps habitual to her. By-and-by she rose somewhat abruptly, and left them without any special leave-taking. They were discussing her after her departure with a good deal of interest, when Miss Morell suddenly interrupted them. Her appearance was a little startling. She wore a crimson peignoir, trimmed with a quantity of cream lace; her fair hair hung in thin pale-coloured tresses over her shoulders, and she had some ivory brushes in her hand.

"It is so cold, and ma Tante's conversation has been so dreary, that I am nearly petrified," exclaimed Charlotte, with one of her little shrugs. "How cosy you look, girls, and not a bit tired or sleepy. I am not a lethargic person myself," she continued with her usual frankness. "I generally sit up half the night reading. Perhaps I shall shock you—but I have a weakness for French novels, and ma Tante detests them, so I generally enjoy them in the retirement of my room."

"What a pity!" observed Mary in her downright way. "French novels are considered such unwholesome reading."

"For children, perhaps; but I am not one of your goody-goody people. I like my little indulgences and relishes, my sauce piquante, and highly-flavoured dishes. Good people and good books are apt to be triste—what you call heavy; they are altogether ennuyé; look at ma Tante, for example; she is admirable, but her Puritan tendencies weary me to death."

"We were talking of Mrs. Reid when you came in," observed Mary. "Dollie seems half afraid of her; she was as quiet as a mouse all the time she was with us, and answered as demurely as a schoolgirl; didn't you, Dollie?"

"She took the most notice of you," pouted Dollie; "she paid you a compliment directly."

"Did she, indeed?" asked Charlotte seriously. "I have said all along that so much depends on first impressions; of course, both you girls have equal chances, and then you came together, but still if she took to Mary——" and here she stopped, for both girls were regarding her with the utmost astonishment.

"Chances of what? Why are you so mysterious?" broke out Dollie wrathfully. She was a choleric little person, and these constant

hints ruffled her. "Why should she not be pleased with us both? we are her invited guests, and she asked us for her own pleasure. If she likes Mary best I should not quarrel with her; she is worth ever so much more than I," continued Dollie in her contradictory fashion; for, as in all youthful alliances, she was ready to swear by her friend.

"Tut, tut," responded Charlotte, "every one is willing to feather his own nest, and I do not believe that you are so ready to give everything to Mary; of course, both of you knew why she sent for you. Maurice's visit last year was a failure; she could not get on with him or his wife either. Maurice was too priestly for her, their Church views differed; and Janet first toadied and then contradicted her. Your sister-in-law is a difficult woman, Mary."

Mary coloured, but did not answer—the conversation was evidently displeasing to her; but Dollie's curiosity was strongly roused.

"Do you mean that Mrs. Reid had any special intention in sending for us—beyond giving us the pleasure, I mean?"

"Do you think it right to ask Charlotte

such a question?" remonstrated her friend gravely. A sudden light had dawned on her; she was anxious to silence Dollie.

"Be quiet, Aunt Mary," returned the girl pettishly. "Charlotte's mysteries are unendurable, and I intend to have my question answered. Come, Charlotte, be a good soul and tell us."

Evidently Miss Morell was dying to impart information. She gave Dollie a knowing look, coughed slightly, hesitated, and played with her ivory brushes.

"I did not think you were so simple, my dear. Mary knows, of course; just look at her."

Mary's steady brown eyes met hers. "I know nothing, and have heard nothing. If I guess anything it is from your manner."

"Well, there is no harm in that," replied Charlotte in her sprightly way. "Every one knows that I am disinterested; if ma Tante were to die to-morrow; I know exactly what I have to expect — a comfortable maintenance and nothing else. She has been perfectly frank with me, and I with her.

'Not a farthing more would I leave you, Charlotte,' she once said to me; 'no, not if I had the riches of Crœsus; you are such a thoughtless, irresponsible sort of person. I hold my money in trust, and it shall never go into hands that will squander or use it rashly.'"

"Well?" interrupted Dollie breathlessly. Mary had turned her face to the fire, and sat motionless.

"Well, little simpleton, there are heaps of money, and no one to inherit it all; and now you know why I am anxious for you both to make good impressions."

Dollie gave a little gasp of astonishment. Evidently she was unprepared for this. Charlotte's information quite took her breath away. At her exclamation Mary faced round upon them both; her cheeks were burning.

"Miss Morell, do you think it was right or honourable to tell us this? Is it kind? Kind to us or to Mrs. Reid? Do you think it will put us at our ease, or make our stay here happier, to know that our visit is fraught with such immense importance?"

Charlotte opened her blue eyes rather widely.

"Dear me, what a very earnest, downright sort of person you are, Miss St. John. Any one else would have been grateful for such a hint; but you are as bad as Grey; there is no understanding you. What difference will it make to your visit, I should like to know?"

"A great difference," was the steady answer. "How are we to be natural, our own selves, if we are always weighing our words and actions, and suiting them to please people? If you told all this to Janet, no wonder she failed so miserably. Maurice is a man; it would act on him differently. He has a mind large enough to rise above such things."

"He never would hear me out," was the somewhat sullen rejoinder; for Charlotte was vexed at the manner in which her confidences were received, and from that night Dollie was her favourite. "Grey was just as bad. He told me almost roughly to hold my tongue, and not put a parcel of lies or rubbish, I forget which, in Bertie's head; but Grey is very wrongheaded about things. He will have it that it is a shame that Walter is disinherited."

"Walter! who is Walter?" exclaimed Dollie; while even Mary seemed suddenly interested.

For a moment Charlotte looked frightened, her manner changed and became less flippant.

"Dear me! do you mean that you never heard of poor Walter? I thought every one knew that sad story. I never allude to it if I can help, because it is so very painful, and I do not like dwelling on painful things;" and Charlotte's eyes became a little misty. "It seems so very dreadful that a mother should be alienated from her only son."

"Her son!" exclaimed both the girls in awe-stricken tones.

Miss Morell nodded.

"Her only son—her only child, I should say, for she never had another. Poor Walter, he was much to blame, but I think his father was to blame too. Ma pauvre Tante! she had enough to suffer between father and son."

"Was not Mr. Reid good to her?" asked Dollie, with a vague recollection of Aunt

Isabel's wilfulness. "She would marry him, you know."

"Yes, against the wishes of all who knew him. I have heard about that," replied Charlotte with another shrug. "There is a fate in these things, I believe. Why, she was beautiful, beautiful, and he old enough to be her father; and though rolling in riches a perfect miser; and with such a temper! My dears, there must be a fate in these things."

"I suppose he was fond of her," observed Dollie. She shivered a little at the dreary interest of this recital. It was late, and the wind was blowing in a gusty manner round the chateau. Charlotte's mysterious voice made her nervous.

"He was fond of her. Of course, ma chère, when men are old and women are young and beautiful, cela va sans dire; but he had a dismal, contracted nature, and he made her life miserable. She was generous, and open-hearted, and incautious. Yes, that is the word—incautious—and perhaps injudicious; and he made her suffer a martyrdom when she displeased him. Poor soul! how she loathed her

life and riches! And then there was the boy for him to mismanage and ruin."

"Ruin!"

"Well, is it not ruin when a father first spoils a child and then goads him by contradiction and restraint into madness? I verily believe there was a touch of madness in both father and son. From a mere baby, she never had any control over him—his father took care of that. When he died she had only lost one tyrant.

"By some strange freak," continued Charlotte,—"she says it was a tardy repentance, —Mr. Reid left her in absolute possession of his money. Railway speculation had enriched him. Crome Park was only theirs by purchase, and he had no landed possessions. Walter had already begun his course of hopeless prodigality. In my presence I have heard his father call him a spendthrift, gambler, and drunkard, and he vowed never to leave him a penny."

"Was it true?"

"It was more than true," replied Charlotte mournfully. "His career at Oxford was shame-

ful. No restraint, no influence, no prayers, no entreaties on his mother's part seemed to have any weight with him. It seemed as though he were bent on ruining himself and every one belonging to him.

"While quite young he ran away with an actress—a woman old enough to be his mother, who induced the unhappy boy to marry her—a step he has since repented, for she treats him shamefully.

"After this sad marriage ma Tante lost all hope of reclaiming him. He had already robbed her almost before her face most ruthlessly, and to escape his ceaseless importunities and persecutions she left Crome Park and began to live abroad. She had made him a handsome allowance, which, she vowed over and over again, is all that he has to expect from her, living or dead; but this is always squandered either by himself or the wretched woman he calls his wife. No money is safe in their hands; at times they are almost reduced to beggary.

"Over and over again," continued Charlotte in a breathless whisper, "has he sought her

out, and cajoled and threatened her until she has been weak enough to listen to him. Since we have been here he has not succeeded in tracing us. Every time she sees him, I think it will be her death. Last time even he seemed terrified by her agony."

"Oh, this is dreadful!" broke in Dollie with a shudder. "Please do not tell us any more, Charlotte. Poor thing, poor thing! Her only child, too. Do mothers ever outlive their love, I wonder?" questioned the girl, with two great tears running down her cheeks.

"I do not know," replied Miss Morell quietly; her flightiness had passed for the time; she spoke quite simply and with real feeling. "Unless anything happens we never speak of him; and then she is always ill, and one is too frightened to notice much. I think she loves him still from something I once saw."

"What was that?"

Miss Morell looked at Mary and hesitated.

"Perhaps I ought not to mention it. You English people—living in England, I mean—have such odd notions of honour! and yet it can do no one harm."

"It was only a drawer," she went on, "that I once opened accidentally in her wardrobe when she sent me for something. The key was in it. There they all were—little piles of baby-linen with rose leaves strewn over them; a rattle and blue shoes; and in one corner a boy's straw hat brown with the sun, and with a torn edge; and two or three dog's-eared lesson-books beside it. Somehow, when I saw it all," continued Charlotte artlessly, "I knew that ma Tante had not ceased to love poor Walter."

Dollie's eyes were still wet when Miss Morell had finished, but the other girl had again averted her face, and still sat silent; and a few minutes afterwards Charlotte rose, with an exclamation at the lateness of the hour.

When she had gone, Mary got up from her seat, and touched Dollie lightly on the shoulder.

"Good-night, Dollie, my dear; you must put all this out of your mind and try to sleep. Charlotte has made you look quite pale."

"Are you sleepy, Aunt Mary?"

"No, indeed. I was never more awake in my life. Hush! we will not talk any more.

I want to be by myself and think over it all. She was very wrong to tell us—very wrong indeed. But the mischief has been done now, and cannot be undone."

"I did not know you could look so stern; Charlotte was quite in awe of you," grumbled Dollie, who was over-excited and not disposed to solitary banishment. But Mary, who had a will of her own, though she seldom exercised it, would hear of no relenting.

"Poor little innocent Dollie! I hope it will do her no harm," thought Mary, as she quietly closed the door and sat down again by the fire; and long after Dollie was asleep, she sat there still listening to the soughing of the wind in the avenue, and watching the dying flame with a sadder face than Mary St. John often wore.

CHAPTER VII.

A NUN'S GRAVE.

WHEN Dolly peeped through her muslin blinds the next morning, she uttered a little cry of dismay and disappointment; the wind had ceased, but a steady downpour of rain was saturating everything; shining pools lay in the courtyard, the red and yellow leaves in the avenue lay in rotting heaps, the very trees looked dismal with their soaking branches. Mary found her disconsolate and a little home-sick, and almost regretful of the green parlour in Abercrombie Road.

"It is an ill wind that blows no one any good," said practical Aunt Mary; "now we shall write our letters and cheer the good folk at home, instead of gadding about and sight-seeing;" and Dollie owned herself much struck by this sensible view of the case.

An English breakfast was laid out in a quaint little salle-à-manger, where Charlotte in a wonderfully braided morning dress was ready to receive them.

The rooms in the chateau were all quaint and a little foreign-looking, with their waxed floors, squares of brilliant carpets, and close stoves; the girls thought the drawing-room magnificent, though it certainly looked a little cold and comfortless. The Louis Quatorze furniture was white and gold, but it was all hidden away under holland coverings; even the pictures and mirrors were veiled in yellow gauze, the great gilt candelabra and clock shone through the misty folds. Romany with feather brush was dusting the great cupboard of china. The floor was marked out in odd patterns, and on the walls were painted cupids and wreaths of roses.

"Ma Tante and I think this room too big and gaudy for use when we are alone," explained Miss Morell, when she showed the rooms to her visitors. "When our gentlemen come we will have the covers off, and you two shall play on the grand piano. It wants a

heated stove and dozens of wax candles to make such a big barrack of a room habitable; now it is as cold as a grave, and how the rain drips on the balustrades outside!" And Charlotte with a little shiver hurried her visitors away.

"This is the morning-room, where we generally sit, unless ma Tante remains in her dressing-room," she continued, opening another door. "We call it le salon Anglais, because we have some of the furniture from Crome Park; look, there is an English fireplace, and there are some of ma Tante's favourite pictures."

"It is a dear little room!" exclaimed Dollie enthusiastically.

The Persian carpet, snowy rug, and soft crimson lounges, gave a complete air of comfort; some choice books in handsome bindings were in the carved bookcase; one or two sunny landscapes hung on the wall; a beautiful Parian group and some Sèvres figures were on the mantelpiece; the tables were strewn with work and books. A glass door opened on to a stone terrace, with ornamental urns

and vases; two or three steps led down to the garden. The girls had a glimpse of wide green alleys and a lawn that looked as trim as a bowling-green. On the rug were two Persian kittens, and a large solemn poodle, who got up and looked at them, and then turned round three times.

"Shake hands with my friends, Mark Antony," remonstrated Miss Morell very gravely, and Mark Antony marched up to them and gave a tasselled paw to each.

"Now for la cuisine and les affaires!" exclaimed Charlotte jauntily, shaking the châtelaine that hung by her side, "In the Chateau de St. Aubert le ménage est tout simple. I am housekeeper, butler—je ne suis quoi—and am kept trotting about half the morning. Amuse yourselves, mes amies; ma Tante has passed a suffering night, and sleeps—so Justine tells me. Oh, this provoking rain, but perhaps it will clear up towards evening." And so saying, Charlotte tripped off, with Mark Antony strutting beside her.

Mary gave an odd little laugh when they were left alone.

" 'From morning to night it was Charlotte's delight
To chat and talk without stopping.'

Do you recollect the old nursery rhyme, Dollie? What an important, made-up, affected, yet perfectly original little person she is! but under the wrappings there is plenty of the real article, I fancy."

"She is so young, you see," returned Dollie, playing with the kittens, and trying to be fiercely satirical. "She asked me to call her Char or Lottie this morning—she even hinted some one had once called her Lottchen. I wonder if some one were a 'he,' Mary. Heaven send us wisdom when we are getting old!—and she must be dreadfully old, ever so much over forty;" and both the girls laughed again, and then sat down in earnest to their letter-writing.

It was a strange solitary day; Charlotte did not come near them again until luncheon, when she chattered to them unceasingly of ma Tante's suffering, and of the attaque aux nerfs under which she had laboured all day. "There was no leaving her for a moment; Justine was a martyr, and was quite weary with her

ministrations; but she had administered a tisane—a sort of composing draught—and in the evening all would be well. "But it is triste, and on your first day too! I am quite au désespoir to think how dull you must be."

Both the girls assured her that they were perfectly content with their work and books; but Charlotte was not to be convinced, and with the good-natured idea of amusing them, she carried them off to her own room after luncheon, and exhibited to them her hoard of trinkets and fineries, which were tolerably numerous, and sufficiently pretty to excite Dollie's admiration. Mary tried hard to seem interested, but she soon wearied of this unexciting occupation; she was tired, too, with her last night's vigil; the drip-drip of the raindrops on the window-sill blended drowsily with Charlotte's soft monotone; she was fast asleep in the big arm-chair long before the trinkets were locked in their cases again.

"Never mind; she is tired, poor darling! we will not wake her," said Charlotte, not at all [illegible]nded at this discovery. "Come nearer [illegible]indow, and I will tell you all about it,

dear Dollie. Oh, the droll little name! Yes, it was at the charge of Balaclava that my Percival lost his life. Percival Hervey—is it not a divine name? I always thought Charlotte Hervey would have sounded so well. But it was not to be." The handkerchief was in requisition, and Charlotte's blue eyes were dried again and again as she poured her sad little tale into Dollie's sympathising ear.

"Poor thing! I will never laugh 'at her again," said Dollie afterwards—for what girl does not grow tender over even an antiquated love story. Charlotte's faded little romance, with its shreds and snippets of sentiment, stood her in good stead, and invested her with a good deal of interest in Dollie's eyes. "Poor little woman! I daresay she was very nice and pretty when Captain Hervey loved her; but Heaven send us wisdom when we are growing old!" repeated Dollie for the second time that day—waxing epigrammatic in her earnestness, to which ejaculation Mary vouchsafed an "Amen."

They had stolen out of the chateau, and

were walking briskly down the avenue, when Dollie gave vent to her little outburst.

When Mary had wakened up, heartily ashamed, from her stolen nap, she found the room quite empty and dark, but in another moment Dollie tripped in, in her little straw hat and with a mischievous look on her face.

"Do wake up, Aunt Mary. I believe we shall all go to sleep in this enchanted castle. The rain has stopped, and Charlotte has gone away to relieve Justine, and a run I must and will have;" and Mary consented, nothing loth, though she somewhat spoilt the fun by insisting on leaving a message with Romany. They had turned to the right on coming out of the chateau, being unaware that they were leaving Lesponts behind them, and were walking down the wide leafy avenue. The rain had indeed ceased; and a faint watery moon rose soon after sunset; the air exhumed moisture, and the rank smell of decaying vegetation ascended from the wet earth and heaps of saturated leaves; the roads had a forlorn aspect and seemed to stretch away into nothingness; be-

they had gone far they were stopped by

the walls of the cemetery, and in another minute were threading the grass-bordered paths.

It would soon be the time for closing, and they hurried on, not a little moved by the strangeness and vast emptiness of the place—only a gigantic crucifix with its lone figure kept watch and ward over the quiet dead. The little chapel was empty; the mourners who had knelt there had gone home; many of the little iron crosses were decked with wreaths of yellow and white immortelles, crowns, and chaplets, and odd devices in black and white bead-work, with scrolls and all sorts of quaint fancies, lay on the grassy mounds; down one side-path were convent graves, each with its little iron cross,—Sister Marie Therèse, Sister Veronica,—just the simple name and age, nothing more. As the girls wandered on in the glimmering dusk, it seemed to them as though grey shadowy nuns might have glided out of their quiet resting-places and followed them.

"I have had enough of this; fancy choosing this for our first walk!" exclaimed Dollie with

a shiver. "Where is the church of the Redemptorist, I wonder, and who was this Sister Veronica who died aged twenty? Could she have been a girl like us, Mary, with real flesh and blood, with a heart to feel and to enjoy? Perhaps somebody," continued Dollie in an awe-struck voice, "one of those Flemish priests we saw, persuaded her that she had a vocation, and then she went in, and the convent's rules, and the monotony, and the awful stillness killed her,—aged twenty, poor Sister Veronica! yes, she must have died of it."

"Nonsense, Dollie; the place is making you nervous; let us go back to the chateau." But the girl was not to be silenced.

"I will tell you all about it. Charlotte and I were talking about it at Lisse, only you did not hear; sometimes you will not listen, you know."

"There is a church here, and they call it the church of Le Redemptorist; there is a convent attached to it, and people go to Benediction to hear the nuns sing; Charlotte has promised to take us."

"Well?"

"No one ever sees the nuns; they sing in a gallery behind a lattice; they are called the red nuns because their habit is red, in recollection of our Lord's passion; they are strictly enclosed, and have a chapel of their own; they never were down in the church; and Charlotte says she will show me the little square hole near the altar through which the priest administers the Blessed Sacrament, and where he hears their confessions. People here say—the Roman Catholics, I mean—that they have a vocation and lead beautiful contemplative lives, that they have lovely grounds, and are very happy; but how do we know? Charlotte says they never do needlework, that their time is spent in devotion and meditation."

"Perhaps Charlotte exaggerates."

"No, indeed; she was quite right when she said so many of them died young; they say so much singing kills them; but they are wrong, it is the life; yes, that is what it is, the life, or rather the want of everything that goes to make up life," finished Dollie, with a little thrill of solemnity in her voice. "Look there, Mary,—Sister Veronica and aged twenty!"

"Poor thing!" ejaculated Mary, much impressed by Dollie's dismal recital.

"You see, as Charlotte says, girls have a great deal of religious excitement sometimes. They are dreamy and visionary; it is all white lilies and paradise; they want to do great things, to give up themselves and their lives; they think they can pray life so peacefully away, that they love God so much, and that the world is so wicked, so full of temptation, and then they have a vocation."

"Yes, but, Dollie, wait a moment; they do have it, you know."

"What! a vocation?"

"Of course; some women are veritable Sœurs du Charité; look at some of our Church of England sisterhoods."

"Never mind them," returned Dollie rather pettishly. "We are too young to argue such wide questions. What a lot of different sorts of people it takes to make up a world! I am thinking now of Sister Veronica aged twenty."

"Alas, poor soul! but she sleeps, and sleeps well."

"There is another," interrupted her frien

eagerly,—"Sister Ursula aged twenty-three, and Sister Monica aged twenty-six; even Sister Mary, Therèse, is only thirty-one. Think how young and how weary they must have been—weary, perhaps, when it was too late. They found out their mistake; they could not go on singing behind lattices for ever, and as earth is not heaven, they may have grown tired with so many prayers; perhaps their heads ached, and they grew weak, and at last their hearts broke under it with the disappointment and the deadness of all things; and so they died. Singing would not kill them!" cried Dollie, with a little outburst of contempt and grief as they left the cemetery.

"You have quite prevented me from ever wishing to visit the church of the Redemptorist," was Mary's rejoinder; "nothing would ever induce me to enter the place now." And she kept her resolution, and waited for a whole dark hour outside in the gloomy street, when Dollie and her companions went one evening.

When Benediction was over, Dollie came out to her with flushed cheeks and hot eyes, as though she had been crying. "The singing

was not sweet at all," she said; "it was harsh and rough, and sounded like men's voices, and yet it went through and through one. Somehow I felt," whispered Dollie, squeezing Mary's arm in the darkness, "I felt as though those poor creatures were singing their own dirge, it was so dull and so despairing!" And after that Dollie never revisited the church of the Redemptorist.

It was quite dark—moonlight, in fact—when the peaked roof of the chateau came in view. To their surprise, the gates were opened and the outer door stood ajar. "I hope they have not been looking for us," said Mary, as she pushed it open; and then she uttered a soft little cry: "I thought you were not coming until next week," she said quite breathlessly. Dollie, who had followed her, stood by confounded; the dim oil lamp hardly lit up the obscurity, and at first she could see nothing, not even the faint stirring of a figure stretched on one of the oaken benches in the corner of the hall, until a sleepy voice answered: "All right; I am sorry I startled you;" and a long form reared itself slowly upwards, developing

into the figure of a tall young man in a brown tweed shooting-coat, who came forward rather languidly, and shook hands with Mary.

"No one expected you. Charlotte said you were coming next week. Dollie, this is an old friend of ours, Mr. Cuthbert Lyndhurst; this is Miss Maynard, Bertie," stammered Mary, who seemed still rather taken aback at this sudden apparition.

"You must not blame us," responded the so-called Bertie, "if Charlotte chose to confuse our dates; it is bad enough as it is, to know we are putting the whole household into a fuss and fever; Charlotte would have gone on explaining for ever, only Grey carried her off to see to our rooms. Somebody said you were out, and nobody knew where; so I lay down and had a nap."

"Of course," answered Mary, laughing; "when did you ever fail to take a nap under any circumstances? Directly I saw something moving in the corner I knew it would be you or Mark Antony."

"That is too bad," returned Bertie; but his eyes twinkled. "I never professed to be a

downright wide-awake person like you, Aunt Mary. How funny that you and I should meet in this out-of-the-way place; isn't there a fire, or a light somewhere, where I can have a good look at you? Why, it is months since we saw each other—three or four at least, Mary."

"Yes, quite that," she answered quietly, as she led the way to the morning-room, which was quite a picture of comfort, with its soft, gleaming lamps and wide circle of firelight. The usual trio of Mark Antony and the kittens, who went by the name of Castor and Pollux, occupied the centre of the rug, which was instantly shared by Mary, while Bertie propped himself up against the wooden mantelpiece, looking down on the girls.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING AN ADONIS.

WHEN Dollie came to know more of Cuthbert Lyndhurst, she became aware of two singular idiosyncracies: first, that in spite of his great height and powerful muscular development he was much given to prop himself against all walls or chimney-pieces with which he came in contact, as though his frame were weak and needed support; and secondly, that every one called him Bertie.

People did it generally by mistake at first, but though they apologised they invariably did it again; whereas his brother, save to a few favoured intimates, was always Mr. Lyndhurst. Bertie said he liked it; it saved no end of trouble, and put things on a pleasant footing.

In appearance he was a tall, fine-looking

young fellow, as handsome as an Adonis; and he had all manner of Adonis-like attributes; he had a healthy freshness of colouring, and in certain moods he had a way of rumpling his fair hair till it stood round his head like a halo; his eyes were grey and clear, and there was an expression of affection in them when people pleased him, that was very winning; but the beauty of his mouth was beyond everything, and some had gone so far as to resent bitterly the light, silky moustache that almost hid it.

It was always a woman who made these sort of speeches; but even men petted Bertie, and said all manner of kind things to him, though they sometimes shook their heads, and lamented over a certain lack of energy—a tendency to stand aside and look on with amused eyes at the battle of life; but his best friends, and Mary among them, were always fiercely indignant at such head-waggings and innuendoes.

What if Bertie were not specially clever? Was cleverness the alpha and omega of life? Was not an honest, kind-hearted young fellow

worth something in this drossy age of ours—one, too, who was as beautiful as Adonis? Energy was a good thing, and it might be well to be sufficiently anxious as to a proper quantity of loaves and fishes for the day's consumption, and to have some notion of the limits and settlements of bills, but there was no need to be always studying one's multiplication table; if Bertie were not a shining light in the eyes of hard-hearted dons and college dignitaries, no one could say that he was without a certain illumination of his own.

If his virtues were somewhat negative, might it not be set down to the score of his youth? If he had not yet acquired the art of making money, and was a little helpless on the subject of the future, he was yet free from any stains in the memory of the past—no clogging debts hung round his neck and impeded his movement; no ungenerous or dishonest act fettered his conscience.

"You have lots of latent power, if you choose to exercise it," his brother said to him once, when his wrath had been excited by some heedlessness or want of judgment; "but

the mischief is, you never take the trouble to think seriously about anything." And his brother was right; Bertie was always going to sleep over something.

He was propped up now against the carved mantelpiece, looking down on the girls; he had given Dollie already one of his swift, half-veiled glances, which saw everything and seemed to see nothing; and had made up his mind about her in a moment.

"A nice little thing," was his inward comment, for he was much given to ruminate over his ideas in an idle, feckless fashion; "not pretty, but with a sort of winsome way that a fellow might think very fetching, but in his opinion not half such a good sort as Mary, who was such a restful, comfortable person that one might do worse than——" but here Bertie pulled himself up, with his hair very much rumpled.

"Well, how are all the Jew babies and the ragged schools, and all the unwashed and barefooted pets?" asked Bertie, with an odd twinkle. "And what do Lettice and all the little Jewesses do without Aunt Mary?" for a

friendship of long standing had placed the Lyndhurst brothers on almost a cousinly footing in the household at Lime Street, and even Grey was called there by his Christian name.

Mary shook her head rather gravely. "I am afraid Maurice will miss me. Janet made me quite wretched the evening before I came away by hinting that he would be ill from overwork long before I came home. Do you know"—looking up in his face and speaking quite earnestly—"I felt as though I were doing something quite selfish in coming away for such a long holiday."

"Of course you did! every one can understand that. Don't you know those sort of uncomfortable persons, Miss Maynard, who are always wanting to be martyrs—who pile up their own agony like faggots round a stake. I don't like to betray confidence, or else I could let you into a secret. Miss St. John intends one day to be canonised, and so does her brother."

"For shame! Never heed him, Dollie. He says sad things sometimes."

"I shall say sadder things by-and-by, if the maternal St. John does not put her shoulder

to the wheel, and leave off saying disagreeable things."

"Hush! I will not have you abuse my sister-in-law. I am always so sorry for Janet; she is such a sadly misplaced woman. Don't you remember what Grey once said about putting a square thing in a round hole. I never think of Janet without remembering that."

Bertie made a grimace. "Mrs. St. John was never a favourite of mine—you know that of old; she is such a terribly handsome woman that one is compelled to admire her in spite of oneself. Do you know her, Miss Maynard?"

Dollie pursed up her lips and owned to the knowledge, but in such a way that Bertie was encouraged to pursue his merciless criticism in spite of Mary's reproving glances.

"She is so awfully clever; she seems to turn out all a fellow knows in the first few minutes, and then she has a sort of disapproving Minerva-like wisdom that provokes one no end. She is always lauding you two to the skies, and saying there is no one like Mr. St. John, and yet she throws cold water on his dearest projects. I don't call that wifely sub-

mission and sympathy, and all that sort of thing that you women are so fond of talking about; do you, Miss Maynard?" finished Bertie, who was determined to secure Dollie's acquiescence.

"Bertie! what makes you attack poor Janet so to-night? and when we haven't met for ever so long!" put in Mary, with a touch of pathos. "You need not be so severe on her because she says hard things of you; that is contrary to the gospel, and is all malice and uncharitableness. There is no love lost between you two—every one knows that; and so you will have your fling sometimes."

"Why did she begrudge you your holiday?" grumbled Bertie.

"Oh, oh! that is what it is," returned Mary, with a pleased smile. "I could not make out why you were so bitter. She does not begrudge me my holiday, sir. She put her arms round my neck, and told me how thankful she was I was to have such pleasure. She is always saying nice things to me; she would give everything she possessed to those she loved; she would work her fingers to the bone

for us all and never complain; but she is so wrapped up in Maurice that she is blind to other things; and she is always making herself wretched about him."

"Then she ought not to plague him so about his work."

"Ah! that is another thing;" and Mary's bright face changed, and she sighed. "That is why I said she was a misplaced woman. She is like you, Bertie; she does not like dirt and squalor and misery. It makes her hard and wretched living in such a place; she cannot understand his way of looking at things; she thinks other men, stronger in body and with less intellect, could do his work. She is ambitious for him, and frets because he has no ambition for himself."

"I can understand that," observed Dollie in a low voice. She was much interested by the conversation; but Bertie shrugged his shoulders, and said with a sleepy inflection of voice—

"Pax! pax! you are getting beyond me, Aunt Mary;" and Mary, with infinite tact, changed the subject; and after discussing the

journey and other more matter-of-fact topics, the girls bethought themselves of the time, and hurried away to prepare for dinner.

At an angle of the staircase Dollie had another encounter. She came face to face with a dark slight young man, who half stopped, hesitated, and finally passed her with a muttered "Good evening."

Half an hour later, the introduction was made in Charlotte's usual fussy manner. Dollie thought Mr. Grey Lyndhurst a great contrast to his brother, and was not very favourably impressed at first.

He was shorter, with dark complexion and hair, and his skin was decidedly sallow. His features, too, were plain, though a pair of honest grey eyes and a general expression of good sense and intelligence redeemed it from insignificance. People who knew him well were apt to speak highly in his praise; that Grey's quiet tongue and steady head were worth all Bertie's social charms, was the opinion of many who were acquainted with both the brothers.

That he was gentlemanly and quiet, and that he had a pleasant voice and way of

expressing himself, was all that Dollie could discover on that first evening; but then girls of eighteen are not very nice observers of human nature, and are rather given to admire an Adonis.

Dollie formed no exception to this rule. She thought Mr. Cuthbert Lyndhurst the handsomest young man that she had ever seen, and was almost inclined to envy Mary the free and easy terms on which she seemed to be with him. She thought it must be pleasant to be able to call an Adonis Bertie, and to be scolded and petted by him in that brotherly way.

Were his manners quite brotherly, after all? Dollie puzzled her little head a good deal over this question during the next few days. He certainly looked very affectionately at Mary; but then Bertie's eyes always were affectionate. It might be by accident rather than design that he was generally to be found loitering by Mary's side, while Dollie, by no choice of her own, was left to his brother. Dollie did not know much about lovers except in theory; but she had her own maidenly opinion on the

subject, and she thought there was nothing especially lover-like in Bertie's sleepy good-humoured manners.

The doubt lay rather with Mary herself. Even on this first evening, she seemed a changed creature in Dollie's eyes; she was always bright, being one of those happy beings who make their own sunshine, but now she was absolutely beaming; her gentle fun quite overflowed, and touched everything. If she were quiet at all it was with Mr. Lyndhurst, of whom she seemed to stand a little in awe; but to Bertie she talked of everything and anything that came into her head, as though she were quite sure of his sympathy in all that concerned her.

Dollie did say one word when they went up to bed together that night. "What a pleasant addition to our party! I like both the Lyndhursts so much—but how very intimate you seem with Mr. Bertie!"

"He and I are such old friends, you see," returned Mary, with a quick blush. "Grey is rather more reserved than his brother, but he is very nice too." And Dollie, with unerring

instinct, understood that she was to say no more.

The girls had a short interview with their hostess the next morning, but it was very brief. The sun was shining, and the young men were waiting for them in the courtyard outside, for they had promised to show them all the sights of Lesponts; but just as Dollie was fastening her long gloves and chattering to Mary, Charlotte came to fetch them to Mrs. Reid's dressing-room.

It was a large, sunny apartment, looking over the courtyard, with a pleasant view of the avenue stretching away towards the cemetery, and furnished in quite the English fashion, with old-fashioned chintz couches and arm-chairs.

Mrs. Reid smiled and held out her hands to them as they entered, but she did not rise; she was lying back in a great cushioned chair, looking very feeble and worn.

She wore a grey wrapping-gown, with a soft grey Shetland shawl drawn closely, as though for warmth; and with her white face and grey hair, and the sad neutral tints of her

garments she looked like a grey shadow of a woman. Dollie uttered a shocked exclamation, but Mary stepped forward and accosted her cheerfully; but none the less did her practised eye—used to many a sick and dying bed—read the stern truth before them; Mrs. Reid was more than a suffering woman—she was not long for this world. She received them with soft flitting smiles, but her voice was very low and weak. "Sit there, my dear," she said, beckoning Dollie to the large square footstool at her feet. "Have you written to your mother, my child? That is right," as Dollie nodded; "never forget her—never let her complain of the least shadow of neglect; there is no love like a mother's love; every other affection has an element of selfishness in it, and asks ever return; but a mother gives and asks for nothing again." And as the girls hardly knew how to answer her, there was a few minutes' silence.

By-and-by she spoke again, but this time to Mary; but she still held Dollie's hand and patted it occasionally. "So the Lyndhursts are here, Charlotte tells me; she made a

week's mistake in her reckoning, and nothing was ready for them. My poor little housekeeper was inclined to cry over it, not having very wise brains of her own. But for Grey's cool head and powers of quiet management, I doubt whether either she or Romany would have been quite equal to the emergency."

Mary laughed and said something about a wholesale invasion of the chateau.

"No! we have plenty of room; the chateau would house half a dozen more; it is only Charlotte's way of putting herself and every one else in a bustle. I can just fancy her fretting and fuming, with Romany and Ursula looking open-eyed and stolid behind her, and then Grey coming in, and putting them all to rights with a word or two. I suppose Bertie was having a nap somewhere."

"Now, Mrs. Reid, I call that too bad," protested Mary.

"Why, isn't it Grey who says he is always falling asleep somewhere or other? I have not much opinion of young men in general, but I must say I think Grey is worth his salt."

"Do you mean to imply the contrary of Bertie?"

"Humph! I don't think he will set the world on fire," was the dry rejoinder. "Take my advice, my dears, and judge a man by his deeds and not by his looks; it is a safe rule and a wise one."

"Bertie has done nothing wrong," began Mary somewhat imprudently; but Mrs. Reid stopped her with even a graver look than usual.

"A little bird once told me that somebody who considered herself a very wise person was a warm partisan of Cuthbert Lyndhurst's, and never allowed any one to say a word in his dispraise; isn't it so, my dear?" But Mary drew herself up and looked displeased; she thought her hostess was taking a strange liberty, and before Dorothy too.

"I am a warm partisan of all my old friends," she said rather stiffly, and with an emphasis on the one word old; and then she looked down and fidgeted with her eyeglasses. Mrs. Reid watched her, and an expression of pain crossed her face.

"Forgive me, my dear; I did not mean to offend you; we sick people think ourselves privileged to say anything. Your sister-in-law was talking to me about him one day. I remember so well her telling me that she had a far higher opinion of Grey than his brother—it was the only subject on which we seemed to agree."

"I have the highest opinion of both of them, that is all," responded Mary in a low voice; and then, with more difficulty, she went on: "If Janet has been talking to you, of course I understand how it is; she and Bertie have never been friends—they don't understand each other. When he comes to our house there is always some trouble in keeping the peace; he says such things, and provokes her, but it is only his fun."

"She said nothing about all that; she only hinted that he was purposeless, and let himself drift on somehow. Do not misunderstand me, my dear," she continued in a lighter tone; "I do not wish to speak against Bertie, but I have ever regarded age as a sort of fingerpost to youth—to give right directions, and close up

dangerous ways. It is hard—indeed it is, Mary—to live out our own bitter experiences —to gain wisdom through suffering—and then to stand by and watch others making just the same mistakes, taking the same terrible roads, and refusing to hear if you call ever so loudly to them to stop."

"Would you have us walk blindfolded through the days of our youth, and give our hands to be guided," replied Mary, a little warmly; and then at the sight of the grey worn face before her, she suddenly softened and became her own sweet self again.

"Dear Mrs. Reid, I did not mean to speak so impatiently. I always fire up when my friends are attacked; it is a foolish habit, and Janet is always scolding me for it, but I do like to think the best of people; no one is without fault, we are all so terribly human," finished Mary, quite humbly.

"Yes, indeed," sighed Mrs. Reid, and her eyes rested tenderly for a moment on Mary's earnest face; "well, I have said my say, I will not tease you with any more unpalatable advice; you and I will be good friends, I

know, for I love a bold, generous spirit. Now I must not keep you any longer, for I hear impatient footsteps in the courtyard outside; perhaps you will each come and sit with me a little in my dressing-room this evening—come separately, that I may learn to know you better;" and then she smiled at them kindly, and bade them go.

"What an age you have kept us," grumbled Bertie, whom they found marching up and down disconsolately in the courtyard; Grey was leaning over the gate, and made no remark. "Does it always take you just an hour and a half to put on that hat?"

"We were with Mrs. Reid; she wanted to see us. I am sorry we kept you waiting, Bertie," replied Mary a little gravely; and then they went out into the avenue.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE BRIDGE AT LAEKEN-WATER.

THE October sunshine was flooding the avenue with yellow glory as the four young people sallied out of the gates of the chateau, and walked on briskly with much crunching of dead leaves under their feet. Mary's fit of gravity did not long continue. Many a heavy Flemish countenance lighted up at the sight of the bright young faces. Every now and then there were soft ripples of laughter and bursts of innocent merriment, of gay badinage, with odd little breaks of silence.

Dollie talked less than Mary. She was rather shy of her companion, who proved himself a somewhat grave cicerone. But if her words were few, her small blue eyes sparkled with delight, and a little rosy flush

tinged the ordinarily pale face very becomingly.

Was it not a dream this strange wandering through an unknown city? Dollie pinched herself more than once to prove that she was awake. If she lived a hundred years would she ever forget this wonderful day?—never, never! and then she started and blushed as she found Grey standing beside her watching her with quiet amused eyes.

"If we were in England we should have a crowd gathered round us to know what you see on those opposite roofs," he said, with a certain droll emphasis that represented fun to him—half quizzing and half serious.

"Oh, do let us stand a moment; we cannot hurry through this. Where are the others going? I never saw anything half so beautiful," cried Dollie breathlessly.

They were crossing the Grande Place when Dolly uttered her little protest. The vast square lay before them looking empty and sleepy in the sunshine; the green benches before the *café* were unoccupied; two or three women in their long black Flemish cloaks

stumped slowly across the rough uneven stones; a huge mastiff, harnessed to a baker's cart, came stumbling round the corner; two priests, with black garments and shovel-hats, walked slowly past Dollie and her companion.

How still and beautiful it looked with the sunlight shimmering on the peaked Spanish roofs and quaint jutting outlines of the buildings. Before them were the façades of les Halles, and in the centre the Tourdes Halles or belfry, with its massive square towers and corner turrets surmounted by a lofty octagon.

"How grand! how exquisite!" cried Dollie; and as she spoke the sweet tones of the carillon floated across the Place. She strove vainly to listen as Mr. Lyndhurst gravely pointed out to her one or two quaint mediæval buildings to which some sort of historic interest was attached. There was "au Lion de Flandre, now a shop, but which tradition asserted that Charles II. once occupied in his exile; and the Crænenburg, now a tavern, where the German King Maximilian, the 'last of the knights,' was kept in durance vile for twelve days on account of his refusal to cede the guardianship

of his son Philip, heir to the crown of the Netherlands, to the king of France."

Dollie was considered an intelligent listener, but on the present occasion she turned a somewhat deaf ear to her companion's historic details. She wanted to be sure that she was not dreaming, as her eyes roved over the deserted Place. She was peopling it in her own way from the Past—figures with peaked Spanish beards in slashed doublets and ruffs, stout old Flemish burghers, and dark thin-faced weavers, crossed and recrossed the vast emptiness, keeping measure with the clanging carillon.

Gentle dames with palfry and hawk and hounds rode noiselessly across the sunshiny square, among them Maximilian's young bride Mary.

"What interests you so much?" asked Mr. Lyndhurst, somewhat weary of this prolonged silence, and astonished at the girl's spellbound attitude and dreamy eyes. Dollie waved a little gloved hand and broke into a wild couplet by way of answer.

"There they are," she cried—

"All the foresters of Flanders,—mighty Baldwin, Bras de Fer,
Lyderick du Bucq and Cressy, Philip, Guy de Dampierre."

"Longfellow. Ah, yes. Very aptly quoted. Bertie is always spouting that. But, Miss Maynard, are you not afraid that we shall lose them altogether;" and then Dollie felt herself a little rebuked, and consented to hurry on.

What a bewildering phantasmagoria that morning seemed to be! How bright and endless, with its vivid series of pictures! Now they were threading narrow grass-grown streets, with dark gloomy buildings on either side. Then came a shining piece of canal. Here barges were moored; swans with arched necks and rustling plumage glided past. Quaint peaked cream-coloured houses, with red roofs, bordered the canals. From one of them Dollie averted her eyes with sick feelings of loathing. Mr. Lyndhurst had told her that it was the Spanish torture-house. Merciful heavens! could such things be. Alas! what scenes of horror and bloodshed had been enacted there! Now the sun shone, and the swans plumed

themselves in the dark water, and all looked peaceful as an autumn day. And Dollie gave a little shiver of relief and hurried on. They saw the Hotel de Ville and the Palais de Justice; and the girls were shown the magnificent chimney-place, said to be carved by a prisoner of the name of Halsman. Then they passed over the place adjoining the Place de Bourg, prettily planted with horse-chesnuts, and adorned with a statue of Jan van Eyck; and after that they went to the cathedral.

The girls were very silent when the great doors closed on them. The young men stood and whispered apart as they watched them. Dollie, indeed, gave one suppressed exclamation as she caught sight of the magnificent interior, with its rich tone of colour and fine proportions. Through the closed gates of the choir they could see the marble monuments and the ancient Gothic choir stalls. The walls were covered with dark paintings; a faint perfume of incense steeped the air; kneeling figures were everywhere; the chapels round the choir had each its silent worshipper. Dollie strayed into one and sat down.

There was a painting by Van Oost the elder representing the infant Saviour in the workshop of Nazareth. A weather-beaten man in a shabby blouse, with a grey grizzled head, came into the chapel and crossed himself devoutly, and knelt down before the picture. Dollie watched him with wide open eyes; her thoughts were terribly confused. She thought of the closed churches in England, with their sparse services and scanty number of worshippers, the chill, wearied feeling that pervaded them on week-days.

Here there were warmth, life, and perpetual movement; noiseless figures passed and repassed through the great door perpetually. Everywhere, in each dark corner, in each dim chapel, was some silent cloaked form. What reverence, what abstraction! How one ought to envy them, thought Dollie. Every one bringing in his or her burden and laying it down before the Holy of Holies, and then passing out refreshed and strengthened into the world again—"Every one for himself and God for us all," thought Dollie, with a sudden effusion of feeling.

Mr. Lyndhurst found her looking thoughtful and a little weary, and said a word or two of excuse.

"I feel as though we have neglected you, Miss Maynard."

"Not at all. Why should you say that? I think it is good to be here," replied the girl softly. She spoke very simply, but she looked at him with eyes so full of wonder and veneration that the young man felt himself silenced, and drew back until she joined him of her own accord, and suffered him to take her home.

This day, so glorious in Dollie's memory, was the precursor of many others. Every morning the four young people, sometimes under Charlotte's chaperonage, sometimes by themselves, wandered of their own sweet will through every nook of the quaint old city.

They visited the hospital of St. John, and saw Hans Memling's great work, the shrine of St. Ursula. Indeed, before many weeks were over the girls grew quite eloquent over the merits and demerits of the old Flemish painters—the splendid groupings of John and Hubert Van Eyck; the freedom and grace

with which Memling treated his figures of small proportions; the comparative merits of the two Van Oosts, Kerckhove, Erregouts, Marc Duvenedo and Jesse Aerschout; and the works of Gheerardt, David, and Pourbus, studied patiently in the Académie des Beaux Arts.

The Béguinage and the Hospital of St. John especially delighted them; the long airy wards of the latter, with their single aisle, and the rows of neat curtained beds on either side, the mediæval aspect of the ancient building, interested them greatly; but their visits to the different churches pleased them most.

It may be doubted whether the young men showed this enthusiasm, though they good-humouredly bore the infliction. They would keep guard outside, while the girls hurried on in the twilight to hear vespers and benediction. Mary, who was more orthodox, would sometimes hesitate and be tempted to linger outside, but Dollie in her impetuous way would hear of no compromise.

"What does it matter? We can't understand their droning. We can say our own

prayers and think our own thoughts quite comfortably. I like to see all those worshippers, and to smell the incense. Such strange thoughts come to me as I kneel in that dark old nave,—there is the darkness, and the people are kneeling in the midst of it, and beyond, through the open gates, are the light and the truth. I cannot tell you quite what I mean, but it makes me better, and I like to be there," finished Dollie, with a little confusion of logic; and though Mary shook her head, and wondered what Maurice would say, she let herself be persuaded. Notre Dame was their favourite church. There was a copy of Van Dyck's Crucifixion that especially drew them. When Dollie was missing, they always knew where they would find her. She would fetch a wooden chair for herself, and place herself near the picture. It hung in the old chapel of the Host, just over the altar. In a black marble niche there stood a life-size marble group of the Divine Child in his mother's arms. The figures were of exquisite beauty. Dollie learned that the work was ascribed to Michael Angelo. Mr. Lyndhurst told her the

composition was undoubtedly his, though the execution was probably entrusted to one of his pupils. How Dollie delighted in that group! the lovely features of the Madonna and the Holy Babe, the softly-rounded outlines, the elaborate finish, riveted her with feelings of intense satisfaction. She wrote whole pages of description to her mother. The widow, sitting by her lonely fireside, smiled faintly over those girlish rhapsodies. How happy she was! how full of life and strength and energy! She thought nothing about those hours in the dim old churches which Mary feared might be so perilous to her young faith. Did she not know her child? Was she not good and trustworthy, sweet, and sound to the heart's core? thought the simple woman, with an entire fidelity to her one living treasure. Those letters of Dollie's were her mother's chief consolations.

The young men were tolerably patient, but they had their revenge sometimes, and would carry off the girls for long breezy walks on the ramparts, or down the roads bordering the canals.

There was a spot that they especially loved to haunt called Laeken-water. Standing on the bridge, they looked down on a little piece of landscape that reminded them of a choice Dutch painting.

The water lay still and clear beneath them. In the distance was a rustic bridge, a church, and some quaintly-peaked houses. The sun shone brightly on the red roofs. There were trees coming low down to the water. Some swans were gliding from under the bridge. Mary and Bertie went down one day to feed them, while Dollie got out her sketch-book, and put in a few hasty outlines.

"I must send this to the dear little mother," she said; and Mr. Lyndhurst leaned against the bridge and watched her busy fingers. The sunbeams had got into Dollie's fair hair; it looked soft and golden against her little brown hat. She had no idea as she sketched in the quaint Spanish gables that she was herself a pretty picture.

Dollie's pencil moved, but her tongue was silent. She was wondering what they were saying to each other down there below the

bridge. The swans had long ago sailed slowly up the stream; but Mary stood still looking down upon the water, and Bertie was making holes in the wet sandy margin with his stick.

It was now ten days since the brothers had arrived at the chateau, but as yet Dollie's opinions were unaltered with regard to them. She still thought Bertie the handsomest and the pleasantest young man that she had ever met, and she was still somewhat in awe of his brother.

It was more a negative than a positive awe. Grey's reticence, his gravity, and the weight of his opinions when he chose to unbend and express them, invested him with a certain superiority in her mind. Careless Dollie found herself measuring her words and serving them up somewhat primly when he entered into conversation with her.

At other times, when they were altogether for example, her girlish spirits would find vent for themselves; and the flood of nonsense, of contradiction, and daring assertion would flow forth. At such times he was always an indulgent listener; he never called her to order, or

put her down as he did Bertie, neither did he dryly interpose his opinion as he would often do with Mary; on the contrary, he seemed ready to draw her out on all occasions, probably to judge for himself what substrata of sense and reality lay at the bottom of the flightiness. Dollie had not a notion that she was being weighed in the balance,—the mere idea would have made her furious. She thought Mr. Lyndhurst very kind and very attentive to all her little wants and wishes; she even told her mother so in her letters, speaking frankly both of him and Bertie. "I like them both; they are both so pleasant and agreeable, but Mr. Bertie is far more amusing. I am always afraid Mr. Lyndhurst thinks me affected and girlish; he does not say so, of course, but he has a way sometimes of curling his lip that makes me feel very small. I have a notion that I keep a set of company manners expressly for him, only sometimes I forget, and am Dollie again."

Dollie got more used to him by-and-by, and learned to judge his mannerisms more truly when they were alone together, as they often

were in their walks. He would be very gentle with her, bringing himself to her level, and trying in a quiet way to find out her tastes and opinions.

On the present occasion he had brought himself with some little effort—for Grey was an essentially shy, reserved man—to speak about his brother and himself. Dollie listened to him politely, and tried to show a proper amount of interest; but presently she had taken out her sketch-book, and a silence had fallen between them. It was not that she was ungrateful, but she was very young, and a grave conversation was not always to her taste. At such times she would have a hankering after Bertie's fun.

But she had yet to learn that Grey was one who was accustomed to have his own way. He had brought himself with some difficulty to speak of his own circumstances and manner of life, and he did not intend to be repulsed or silenced until silence was pleasing to him. He was patient by nature, but withal firm, and, as some people said, a trifle hard; but the hardness was shown chiefly to himself. To those

he liked he could be wonderfully gentle, effacing himself for their sakes, and subordinating his own tastes and wishes to theirs.

He watched Dollie's slender fingers for some time, and then resumed the subject as though he were unconscious of any break.

"Blenheim Square is rather a dreary place; and, for the matter of that, Teddiford Place is worse."

"I have never seen either," replied Dollie rather absently, putting in a willow that hung near the bridge. "The dreariest place I know is Trevilian Terrace, Abercrombie Road—the abomination of desolation, that is what I call it."

"Is that the place where your mother lives? it lies somewhere between Kensington and Earlscourt, does it not?" asked Grey with a shade of eagerness; and as Dollie nodded, he went on, "I should think it was highly preferable to Teddiford Place; you see it leads out of Blenheim Square. Blenheim Square is only one of a whole chain of squares, each with a separate dulness and dreariness of its own. Many of the houses are large and handsome, and are

inhabited by rich city magnates, who have not yet moved westward; but Teddiford Place is a shade lower in the scale. The houses are good, but they are mostly let in lodgings; there are not more than a dozen houses in the whole of Teddiford Place."

"Why do you live there if it be so dull?" asked Dollie with divided interest, for the willow was claiming her attention.

"My poverty and not my will consents to dulness," he returned with a laugh; "but I do not mean to go back to Teddiford Square. I have taken chambers—it sounds grand till you see them, Miss Maynard"—("If I ever do," thought Dollie, with secret contradiction) —"they are near Gray's Inn. My bedroom is the size of a good-sized trunk, and my sitting-room will hold about three people comfortably; but what's the odds when one is too hard at work to notice anything," finished Mr. Lyndhurst with an attempt at lightness.

"Charlotte says that you have nearly killed yourself with over-work," said Dollie gravely, raising her eyes from the sketch; "don't you think it wrong to play with your

health in that fashion?" she continued, forgetting her fear of the young barrister in her feminine delight at administering a lecture. "You were on the brink of brain fever, Mr. Bertie says."

"Well, so I was," he returned, pleased at this manifestation of interest in his concerns; "at least so they all said; and so I am here to vegetate and rest a while—why, I have not opened a book for three weeks! You see a briefless barrister has hard uphill work before him. I am poor now, but I am not enamoured of poverty. I must get my feet on the first rung of the social ladder; but till the climbing begins, one has to be satisfied with a pittance; that is the real state of the case, Miss Maynard."

"We are poor too, mother and I; but I am not satisfied with my pittance," returned Dollie carelessly; "I should like to be rich, very rich—to have all the pleasures of life open to me, to travel, to see pictures, to wear grand dresses and jewels. I am worldly-minded enough to care for all sorts of indulgences; rich people have much the best of it in every

way,"—and then she coloured and stopped abruptly. Grey thought her sensitiveness had taken alarm; but in reality a sudden remembrance of Charlotte's talk crossed her mind, and she hastily changed the subject.

Meanwhile, a very different conversation was taking place under the bridge, where Mary was arguing her point with an eagerness and persistence that was foreign to her usual placid nature, while Bertie had some difficulty in defending himself.

"You know that I am right—that every one who knows you says the same thing," she continued, when she had concluded her lecture with its various heads — Bertie's lack of energy, his indifference to things in general and himself in particular, his lamentable lack of ambition, and other crimes of suchlike heinous character. "You cannot say I am wrong, when every one whose opinion is worth having agrees with me."

"So everybody is to be my Mentor," said Bertie sulkily; for with all his sweet temper he could be sullen on occasions.

"The wisdom of the many must be right,"

she answered playfully, for she had no wish to anger him; "surely Maurice is a respectable authority, and so is your brother."

"Oh, we all know your opinion of Grey," answered Bertie, pulling his fair moustache in an annoyed way. Mary could have laughed outright at his boyish irritation and jealousy, but she was never wanting in tact, so she replied soothingly—

"I think very highly of Grey, but I daresay I could find plenty of faults in him if I were to take the trouble to discover them. Now don't be cross, Bertie, because I am such a true friend that I am more anxious for your future welfare than for your present happiness; come, say something pleasant to me after all the trouble I have been taking." But Bertie was not to be mollified so easily; he had had his lecture, and it had disagreed with him; in fact, certain words that Mary had uttered pricked him most uncomfortably in the conscience, and Bertie hated to be made uncomfortable.

"If you think me such a thriftless good-for-nothing fellow, I wonder you have any-

thing to do with me," he grumbled, for his pride was up for once in his life. "You used not to be so hard upon me, Mary; if you are going to give me up in this way, you had better tell me so at once, before I make a downright fool of myself."

"I never give up my friends as long as I can keep them; don't talk such nonsense, sir," she replied lightly; but her voice was very soft, and she put her hand gently on his arm as she spoke. Dollie saw the action, and wondered at the little demonstration. Bertie was for ever making these sort of speeches to her, and she was for ever parrying them; but as yet no word of love had been spoken between them.

"I shall believe the world is coming to an end when you do give me up," Bertie returned very slowly and seriously; and then as she looked in his face and smiled, the matter seemed understood between them, and Bertie's brow cleared.

"We will go back to them now," said Mary cheerfully; "look, there is Dollie waving her sketch-book." It seemed quite

natural that they should climb up together hand in hand. No special word of love had been spoken between them; no promise had been given or received; yet Bertie in his heart was sure of Mary's love, and Mary knew that she would never be the wife of any other man if Bertie were to be untrue to her.

CHAPTER X.

A RETROSPECT AND A DREAM.

THE days passed happily away in the old chateau. Charlotte, who scarcely knew her quiet home under its present altered aspect, was in a state of fussy excitement from morning to night. She was for ever planning some fresh surprise to please her young guests; every morning there were long mysterious confabulations with Romany, Ursula, or Justine; she tripped along the dim corridors, jingling her keys, and humming little snatches of song, looking quite fresh and young in her smart braided dresses. "Where are you going, Cousin Charlotte?" Bertie would say sometimes, pursuing her in his teasing way. "What a charming toilet! I suppose that is Madame Elise's handiwork;" for the rogue knew how to get a rise out of her, as he called it.

Charlotte shook her head at him with a simpering smile—

"Of course not, you foolish fellow; why, Madame Elise would empty my poor little purse in no time," she answered in her airy way. "Justine made this; oh, she is excellent—a treasure of treasures; she knows that I like 'quelque chose de coquet, une toilette très habillée.' Oh, she is a good creature; ma Tante undervalues her."

"But what do you call this stuff?" persisted Bertie, with a serious countenance; "it reminds me of a dress Lady Emily Howard wore last winter." Now Lady Emily Howard was the mother of Bertie's pupil.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Charlotte, with sparkling eyes. "I must tell Justine that. Of course Lady Emily has toilettes très comme il faut. I suppose you can't tell me if her corsage was cut exactly like mine?"

"Oh dear, yes; I should say there was not a hair-breadth's difference—not the eighth of a fraction of an inch," returned Bertie, who had not the faintest conception what a corsage meant, and who was perfectly aware that

Lady Emily was a stout blonde who always wore black. "You are as alike as two peas."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Charlotte, who was quite ravished with this fib; "how very extraordinary! thank you so much for telling me, Bertie."

"And you will be sure to have gâteau for dinner; I am so tired of compote!" exclaimed Bertie in a coaxing voice.

"Yes, yes," she nodded, and trotted off well pleased, to hunt through her stock of preserves; of course there would be gâteau, and marrons glacés too. Bertie was a veritable schoolboy in his love for sweet things, and Charlotte took care that this should be gratified. "'As like as two peas!' I must tell Justine that," she said to herself as she unlocked the great presses in her storeroom.

Sometimes when they had an hour to spare, the girls would follow her about. Dollie fell in love with the old Flemish kitchen when she first saw it. The sun was streaming through the low windows and in at the open door; the red brick floor, the great oaken

benches and presses, the brass stew-pans and kettles ranged round the walls, old Katchen stumping across the floor in her sabots, with a long wooden ladle in her hand. "What a picture it would make," thought Dollie.

Katchen was quite a character. She was a weather-beaten Flemish peasant, with a square, stolid face, cheeks like winter apples, and a skin wrinkled and brown as parchment.

She spoke English volubly—scolding in a high shrill key when anything put her out, and arranging her sentences in a curious confusion, without regard to either person or tense.

Charlotte was greatly in awe of her, and always spoke to her in a half-apologetic, half-coaxing manner.

"Now look you, Meess," Katchen would say, hobbling up to them with her ladle outstretched and pointed towards them; "un vol-au-vent ou des petits pâtés, that say you—bien —va-là—me—am I a pâtissier? can I mind my pot-au-feu, go to market, make kickshaws, and all at the same hour of the day? Katchen, have you been at the poissonnerie? have

you marchandé le maquereau, des crevettes? have you les poulets. Va! what take you me for? Am I of all work? can I fly comme poulet? can I swim down the canal comme les canards? Bien, thou shalt mind thyself, Katchen Deyster. No English meess shall put on thee, and drive thee like a lame cow."

"My good Katchen, what has put you out?" Charlotte would say almost humbly; "is it the vol-au-vent that displeases you? Why, that is your chef d'œuvre, my excellent Katchen,—that and your bouilli and your salads."

"Hein me, I am worth my salt," returned Katchen grimly; "they know me au marché. Jacques Dullaert, he trembles and turns his back when he me sees. Jacques, dost thou still sell stale fish? that say I to Jacques when I pass him. He has not the spirit of a calf to shake his stupid head even. Va, for cet Jacques-là;" and Katchen snapped her fingers in scornful remembrance of Jacques' treachery.

Dollie took a great interest in the little old woman in spite of her shrill tones; she used to steal into the great kitchen sometimes, and

seat herself on the low window-sill, in company with the black cat; she watched the compounding of sundry foreign dishes with great interest, and soon mastered the mysteries of the potato-salad and the pot-au-feu, she even accompanied Katchen to market. The Grande Place on those occasions was always her favourite resort; the vast space under the belfry, the entire square, was filled with covered stalls; crowds of Flemish peasants in their long cloth cloaks, with handsome crosses and pendants and earrings—often of great value and handed down as heirlooms from generation to generation—presided over their wares. Dollie used to pace down the long narrow aisles between the stalls speculating on the busy faces round her. Once Katchen stopped to exchange greeting with an old peasant woman at the corner of the market; she had a yellow puckered-up face, and mumbled out her jargon in a toothless manner. Nevertheless two brilliant earrings set in silver dangled below her withered cheeks, and a great cross hung over her black cloak. "Marie sells good butter and eggs,

but she cheats like an old fox," said Katchen shrewdly, as they left the stall.

Both the girls loved this busy scene. Bertie would join them sometimes, and purchase all sorts of incongruous articles; he brought home once a pair of yellow sabots, a nutmeg-grater, and a handful of nails and old iron; another day he returned laden with plaster images of St. Joseph and the Holy Family, a boy carrying some green flower-pots and a copper kettle followed him. "I got them for a few centimes, and it was such fun driving the bargain," he said, when Charlotte took him to task for bringing home a pack of rubbish.

The holland covers had all disappeared from the great salon, the red velvet chairs and couches, with their white and gilded woodwork, were exposed in all their magnificence; the huge black stove was opened; in the evening a bright fire burned cheerily; wax candles were lighted in the gilt sconces; the grand piano always stood open.

Mrs. Reid remained in the seclusion of her dressing-room for some days, but both the

girls were frequently admitted. Dollie generally had the hour before dinner allotted for her visit. She would come in from her walk, and go upstairs without waiting to take off her hat. Mrs. Reid always welcomed her kindly. Dollie would take the footstool at her feet, and give her a *resumé* of the day's doings, the pictures they had seen, the walks they had taken, and sometimes even the conversations that had taken place.

Mrs. Reid used to enjoy the girl's graphic descriptions. Dollie had a happy knack of making the most of a thing; she would touch up her sketch, putting in all sorts of graceful finishes. They had been down by the English convent, and had wandered ever so far. "It was all sandy and flat, with nothing but the canal and a windmill or two, but the sunset was lovely, and glorified everything; the sky was all red and glowing, and there was a fresh wind blowing in our faces; we seemed walking straight on as though we could not help it, right into the sunset—up, up, into the heart of the brightness; and then Mary and Charlotte said that we must come back, and

we turned round, and then we were on the earth again, and it looked cold and shadowy and grey."

"That is what we are always doing, turning our back on the brightness," observed Mrs. Reid softly, as she stroked the pretty fair head that leant against her. She and Dollie were becoming fast friends. Later in the evening Mary would come up and have her turn.

It was curious to watch Mrs. Reid's different reception of the two girls. When Dollie's bright little face appeared, Mrs. Reid would lay down her knitting, and beckon the girl to the footstool at her feet; there would be plenty of kind quiet caresses; but with Mary there would be no stroking of hair, no footstools or attitudes of humility.

"Well, Mary," she would say, holding out her hand with a smile of welcome; and Mary would stoop over the easy chair and kiss her cheek, and then she would draw up her seat cosily to the fire, and take out her work.

They had long quiet talks, chiefly on grave subjects. Mrs. Reid used to question her about her work at the East-end of London,

the family life at Lime Street, the characters and training of the five little girls that were so dear to Aunt Mary's heart. She used to consult Mary about her own pensioners. Somehow she seemed to have an intuitive perception that the girl was reliable and wise beyond her years. Mary had sundry little glimpses into the strange Anglo-Flemish life that the elder woman led. In a quiet unobtrusive way she did a large amount of good—little secret acts of benevolence, generous contributions to the needy foreigners among whom she lived, were always being traced to the Lady Bountiful of the chateau; and she spoke freely of such matters to her young friend.

"I am not like that large-hearted Shunamite. I do not dwell among my own people," she once said rather mournfully, "but I think I owe something to the poor folk round me. You must not think that I lose sight of the people at home. Mr. Champneys, our old vicar, has always acted as my almoner at Crome."

"I think Maurice knows him. He must be very old now—nearly eighty."

"Seventy-eight on his last birthday. He wrote rather a doleful letter the other day, dear old man! and complained that he was getting very feeble and unfit for his work. He even hinted that he thought of leaving his parish under the care of some conscientious man, and going down into Devonshire to be near his daughter. Poor Mrs. Champneys is a sad invalid, and he thought a year or two's residence in a warmer climate would be beneficial to her. She is his second wife, and is about twenty years younger than the vicar."

"Do you mean that he is really going to have a curate in charge? I wonder—oh, I wonder—if Maurice could be induced to apply for the curacy," exclaimed Mary, and then she stopped and clasped her hands; the sudden thought seemed too much for her.

"I thought you told me that his heart was so much in his work," asked Mrs. Reid, in some surprise.

"Yes, but he is overworked. Janet says so, and I know she is right. He will not spare himself; and he is not strong, and in winter he gets a cough which he cannot shake

off. If we could get him back into the country again it would be so good for him and the children. They are delicate little creatures, and Janet says it is so bad for them having no garden to play in, and no fresh air to breathe—all narrow streets and chimneys. It is breaking her heart for them all to live in such a place." And Mary's earnestness was so great that the tears rose to her eyes. The burden of her sister-in-law's complaints lay heavy on her heart; perhaps here there might be a way of lightening the load.

"But, my dear, the living is a very small one. The rectory is certainly very roomy and comfortable, but Mr. Champneys could not afford to give his curate in charge more than £200 a year. Your brother could not live on that."

"That is what Mr. Denoon gives him now, and he lets him live in one of his houses. They say few curates have as much, but Maurice does the work of two. I do not know what is to become of them all if Maurice does not soon get a living. They are drawing out all the capital of Janet's little fortune, and

have only a few hundreds left; and the children are growing up and need education," went on Mary sorrowfully, too much absorbed with the sadness of her subject to remember to whom she was speaking; afterwards when she recollected it in the quiet of her own room, her cheek turned crimson, and she was ready to cry with mortification and vexation.

"She will think that I am asking her to help Maurice and to give us money," she said, when in the bitterness of her heart she carried her tale to Dollie; and though Dollie comforted her with a great many kind words, the remembrance of her thoughtlessness gave Mary many a secret stab.

Mrs. Reid did not seem surprised at her young friend's statement; she had heard it all before from Janet herself.

"I think it is wrong for any man to overtask his strength as Maurice is doing," she replied seriously. "I spoke to him very plainly when he was here; but he did not take my advice in good part; even excellent people like Maurice can be self-willed and put themselves in the wrong sometimes;" but Mrs. Reid

did not add that she had made offers of help, unknown to Janet, and that she had been much angered by Maurice's cool and somewhat curt refusal to accept her gifts.

"What right have we to her money? how was I to bring myself to take such sums at her hand?" he said with a storminess quite unusual to him, as he detailed the interview afterwards to his wife. Perhaps the manner of tendering the gift had offended his notions of independence; but any way he told himself that the thing was impossible.

"And you refused her bounty! Had you forgotten your wife and your little ones? Oh, Maurice, Maurice, how could you be so mad, so ungrateful?" And Janet's pale face flamed and quivered with the passion of her excitement; never before had she spoken to him so reproachfully.

"Hush, my dear! hush, Janet! can you not trust your husband?" he replied tenderly. "Can I do what I feel to be wrong because of my wife and children?"

"Why do you reproach me?" he said afterwards, when there had been silence between

them, which, with all her courage, she had not dared to break. "You knew when you married me that I was a poor man, and that your life would be a hard one. Do you regret it? Is it harder than you can bear, Janet? If so, look me in the face and tell me so, dear wife, and though it breaks my heart to hear it, I will allow that your complaint is just." But as he took her in his arms, and she heard the falter in his voice, she could not tell him the bitterness that seemed to saturate and poison her very life. Had she not endured already, and would she not endure, if strength were given her, to the very end for his sake?

"Your love will always make me happy. I desire nothing for myself. Is it not enough that I am your wife?" she murmured, leaning against him, but not showing him her face. "It is only your good and the children's. I have never thought of myself." And in her soreness and humility Janet spoke the truth—she coveted the money not for herself but for him.

"I know all about it, my poor woman," returned Maurice rather sadly, stroking the beautiful face as though it were a child's.

Why was it that they loved each other so, and yet that she so often failed to give him comfort? Was it because in the long years of their union that he had learned to read her aright, that in spite of her many virtues the ambition and worldliness of her character were becoming known to him? Might it not be that those keen eyes had discovered under the silence, the seeming submission, the quiet laying down of her will to his,—the secret rebellion, the differing opinion, the dumb protest of an active dominant nature? Was she satisfied? would he ever be able to satisfy her as long as they two, united in heart but with different purposes and aims, journeyed through the rugged ways of life?

Sometimes when he was weary a secret terror would cross his soul. What if he were to grow weak, and were to succumb to her influence? what if she were to tempt him in some bitter straitened hour, when his body was feeble and his mind dry and arid, tempt him away from his work, from the place where Providence had led him? what if she should hold out to him their poverty and the needs

of the poor babes that she had brought into the world, and he should listen to her,—he who had always exalted his priestly office so high above other work, who had always refused to listen to the wife of his bosom, unless her voice accorded with the dictates of his own conscience?

This fear was upon him now, when her weary head was resting on the pillow, and comforted by his tenderness she had slept; he had stood looking down at her for a moment, tracing the unbent lines, the tired droop of the mouth, the furrows that were beginning to mark the smooth white brow.

"My Janet, my poor tired Janet! if I could only rest you and make you happy!" he whispered, shading the lamp with his hand. And the slow moisture gathered in his eyes; and then, as was his custom when his heart was heavy for her and for himself, he went away and poured out the depth of his loving and wounded soul, until he felt that his prayer was heard, and that something of his old peace had returned to him.

Mary knew nothing about this little episode

that had occurred during the last days of their visit. Maurice's confidence was sacred, and his wife respected it; she was therefore a little surprised and disappointed at what she considered Mrs. Reid's want of sympathy. "Because she does not like Janet she seems to have lost all interest in them both," she said to herself.

It was therefore a relief when Mrs. Reid quitted the subject. Her next speech took Mary by surprise. "Do you know that I parted with Crome once? has Maurice told you?" she asked somewhat abruptly.

"Crome Park! your beautiful place in ——shire."

"Yes; the house my husband purchased when we were first married. How proud I used to be of it in those days!" and an expression of pain crossed her pale face. "It was many years ago; circumstances of which I cannot speak determined me to sell it; it would have broken my heart to part with it if it had not been broken before." Here she sighed heavily, and went on in a hard, fixed voice as though she were going through a task: "It was pur-

chased, this grand old place of ours, by a wealthy American who had taken a fancy to it; he died very unexpectedly about two years ago, and then a great hankering came over me, and I got it again into my own hands."

"Do you mean that you rebought it?" asked Mary, wondering not a little over this sudden confidence.

"No, his heirs were willing for me to do so, but the time was not yet come for that. I took it on leasehold, with the intention that hereafter some of those belonging to me might purchase it in the years to come. I had parted with it once, knowing that I should never see it again, and not caring then who should come after me; but now the longing to possess it has been too strong for me, and I have given in to it."

"Do you mean never to come back to it?" asked Mary, moved to strong sympathy by the weary, pathetic voice. Mrs. Reid shook her head, and a strange expression passed over her face.

"I do not know. I have a great wish to die under my own roof; living or dead, I mean

to cross the threshold, which I first crossed as a bride. Do you know, Mary, that in my dreams I am always at Crome? night after night, night after night, always there, never here."

"Dear Mrs. Reid, I should think that must be a comfort to you."

"Sometimes, not always; ah, there is pain even in that. Last night I was crossing the great hall between the marble pillars; I could see the anteroom plainly with its large mullioned window opening on the park, the grass running up to the very window-sill, so that one seemed to walk through the rooms straight into the greenness. I had a child in my arms, what child I know not." Here her voice sank into a whisper. "I seemed always afraid of dropping it; it was a little creature, but my arms were weak and had no power; all my strength would not let me hold it; the drops of agony stood on my forehead. I thought I tried to call out for some one to come and take the child; and I could not speak; and then it fell and rolled away from me, out among the daisies, lost in long waving grass; but I could

see its dumb look of reproach as it fell, and feel the touch of the baby hand trying to grasp my fingers."

"Dear friend, you are ill; you must not excite yourself like this," exclaimed Mary, rising from her seat in some alarm. Mrs. Reid's face had become an ashen-grey; her hands were cold and shaking; it was an inexpressible relief that Charlotte that moment entered the room.

"What has kept you so long? You must be tiring ma Tante," she said, bustling up to them in her usual fussy way; but on catching sight of her aunt's face, she stopped, and her manner changed.

"What is it, auntie dear?" she said, kneeling down and chafing the cold hands between her own. "What has Mary been doing? We will banish her if she has been naughty."

"No, no; it was the baby. I could not hold my own baby," returned the poor woman in the same strained voice. "Last night, you know,—I told you, Charlotte,—the little white baby."

"Leave her to me," said Charlotte quickly.

"She has been over-exciting herself; and want of sleep sometimes makes her like this; it is nothing, just a brief wandering."

"Oh, let me stay; surely I can do something to help you," cried poor Mary, feeling dreadfully frightened.

"No, no," repeated Charlotte, stamping her foot with impatience. "I tell you that I understand these moods, and shall quiet her best alone; do go, there's a good girl." And Mary reluctantly obeyed, but turning round before she closed the door, she saw Charlotte tenderly lay the grey head against her breast and hush her like a child.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERRUPTED EVENING.

THAT scene haunted Mary for days afterwards; she could not bring herself to retail it to Dollie; something in their conversation had touched a too sensitive chord, and the poor tortured heart had given way for a time.

"She is asleep now. I have given her a composing draught, and Justine will sit by her for an hour or two," Charlotte said, when she came into Mary's room to wish her good-night. Charlotte's eyelids were red; she looked softened and subdued.

"Is she often like this?" asked Mary in a whisper; for Dollie's door was ajar, and that little person might frisk out on them at any moment.

"No, not often," returned Charlotte reluctantly. She evidently wanted to slip away

without a word; but Mary's anxiety was too great. "It is only sometimes — when the pain has been very bad, and she has had a great many sleepless nights; then if she gets talking of the past, she is liable to be suddenly excited. If I had been there, I should have known and hushed her up directly."

"It was a dream she was telling me," began Mary; but Charlotte interrupted her rather hastily.

"Oh! she is always dreaming. It was Walter, of course—Walter as a baby. It is always the same thing. Sometimes she is stringing daisy chains with him; sometimes she is pelting him with roses, or picking up apples in the orchard; sometimes he is wading through great pools with his bare rosy feet, and she is gathering coloured seaweed for him. It is always Walter as a child—when she was a young mother, and he was her idol. Ma pauvre Tante!" finished Charlotte with a heavy sigh, as she hurried away. Somehow Mary never liked the little woman so well.

Mary was dreading a summons to the dressing-room the next evening; but to her

infinite surprise they found, on returning from their walk, that Mrs. Reid had ensconced herself in the great crimson fauteuil in the drawing-room, with her shaded lamp and her knitting beside her. Charlotte was warming herself on the rug, in company with Mark Antony, and chattering breathlessly.

Dollie rushed up to her aunt with an exclamation of delight, and Grey followed her somewhat gravely; but Bertie looked rather taken aback at the sudden apparition. In the secrecy of his heart he could have willingly dispensed with his hostess's company. He hung back behind the others, looking a little shy and sheepish for once in his life; and his greeting when it came was of the briefest.

It was evident that he was no favourite, and that he knew it.

Mrs. Reid was far more gracious in her reception of his brother. She inquired about his health, questioned him as to his prospects, and showed some amount of interest in his answers; but she was a little distant in her behaviour to both the young men. Grey's penetration had long perceived this, and it made

him stiff and constrained in her presence. It was some time before the little party thawed into its usual sociability; but Bertie's shyness and Grey's hauteur could not long hold out under the infectious influence of Dollie's merriment.

Dollie was very shrewd in her way, and she soon felt the repressive atmosphere. "The young men bore her, and she bores them in return," she said to herself. "Our evenings will be spoiled if Mary and I do not exert ourselves, and wake them all up;" and so she set to work at once.

She came down presently in her quaint green dress with the puckered sleeves, looking very sweet and piquante, Grey thought, as he watched her flitting about the room. She stopped and made him a sweeping curtsey once, waving her arms and smiling in a bewitching way.

"May it please your highness to tell us why you look as grave as a judge to-night?" said wicked Dollie, braving even the formidable Mr. Lyndhurst in her new crusade. "Mr. Bertie, Mary and I are going to sing; you may turn over the leaves if you like—if

you will promise not to spoil our duet with your carelessness."

"Let me turn over," exclaimed Grey, putting his brother aside very unceremoniously, and coming forward eagerly.

Dolly pouted just a little, but she did not dare to refuse him. She never quite enjoyed singing if Mr. Lyndhurst stood beside her; she had a notion that he thought badly of her powers; she would get confused and lose her place, and then break off scolding and laughing.

But to-night she must wake them all up; it would not do to be thinking of herself. There was Bertie sulking and pulling his moustache on the big settee, and wishing that Mrs. Reid and her knitting were anywhere else, and that Grey had not taken his place. "Confound the fellow! what does he mean putting me aside like that? Grey is no lady's man!" fumed Bertie; and then he grinned mischievously when Grey forgot about turning over altogether, but just stood bolt upright in his place—listening to the little bird in the green plumage trilling out her fresh clear notes beside him.

Dollie frowned at him, but sang straight

on. When she had finished, she took her old accustomed footstool at Mrs. Reid's feet, and the others grouped round her.

How could even sulky Bertie keep aloof, when her girlish laughter chimed in every now and then, so softly, yet so mirthfully? when Mary looked at him with such wistful eyes, and kept the place vacant beside her? Of course he slipped into the circle, and in time became his old bright self again.

"Thank you all for a pleasant evening," said Mrs. Reid quite cheerfully, when she bade them all good-night. "Give me a kiss, you little yellow-haired witch!"

Dollie clapped her hands, and danced up to her own room. "If I am a witch, I shall bewitch you all," she said gaily. "If you have not done so already," was Grey's unexpected answer, as he lighted her candle. As she looked at him, she saw there was a little flush on his face, and his eyes looked bright and dark.

"Why! he is not so plain after all," she said to herself; and somehow the little compliment did not slip out of her mind. Mary had

told her that Grey never paid compliments; that he could not make a pretty speech to save his life; and he had made one to her! she remembered that.

Things soon flowed on more smoothly; the young men soon became accustomed to their hostess's presence. Grey took to reading aloud in the evening; he had excellent taste and a clear sonorous voice. Sometimes the book was laid aside, and a brisk discussion was carried on between him and Mrs. Reid. The girls were astonished at the stores of knowledge displayed on these occasions. Mrs. Reid had excellent reasoning powers, and a retentive memory. Grey did not always have the best of the argument; he was shrewd rather than clever, and could better retail other men's wisdom than originate his own.

He was capable, discursive, and went to work in a cut-and-dried manner, being much addicted to formalism and certain well-known highroads to learning, being more realistic than imaginative. He could not always adapt himself to the vagaries of genius; and would have cleared away the rubbish from the ruins

of the Past, before he deigned to explore their beauties.

Most people respected Grey; but any one gifted with enthusiasm was apt to find him a little too heavy and matter-of-fact for their taste—all of which he knew, and was much given in consequence to assume a certain taciturnity and stubbornness of reserve that was hardly natural.

Dollie sat like a little bright-eyed mouse on these occasions, and never ventured to open her lips. She thought Mr. Lyndhurst remarkably clever—how much of Grey's eloquence, I wonder, was inspired by the sight of the little fair head bent down over the trifling piece of fancy-work. He used to cast furtive glances in that direction. Sometimes Dollie looked up and caught them; she was puzzled but still unconscious; a sense of being watched presented itself somewhat vaguely to her imagination; but she was young, and Grey was so very quiet, and the time was not yet come!

One afternoon the girls went out alone; for once their escort was lacking. Bertie had

gone down the canal in a barge, and was not expected back until late in the evening; and Grey had one of the bad headaches to which he had been subject of late, and had been ordered off by Charlotte to the couch in the morning-room.

He pulled such a long face when he found Mrs. Reid was to be his only companion, that Dollie's kind heart was quite moved, and she hinted shyly to Mary that one of them might offer to stop and read to him.

"But the other could not go out alone, and Charlotte is too busy to come with us," remonstrated Mary; "besides, it would look rather strange our staying," at which matter-of-fact remark Dollie first looked angry and blushed, and then tossed her head and declared that nothing could be further from her wishes than to stay indoors this lovely afternoon—that she only wanted to be kind and practise her Christianity, and that Mary was a goose to say such things—strange, indeed! and she went off in a little heat and flurry.

Dollie's brief ill-humour soon vanished, and they passed a charming afternoon in their own

fashion, dividing it pretty equally between the Béguinage, the Eglise de Jérusalem, and the Church of St. Jacques; and then, as ill-luck would have it, Dollie took it into her silly little head that they must go to the cathedral on their way home.

Now they had been gadding about for three mortal hours, and Mary was tired,—though she would not have owned it for worlds,—and it was growing dark, and they were alone, and the proprieties of the chateau would be offended, and most likely Grey would be coming out to look for them, all of which she gently hinted in her sensible manner; but Dollie was deaf to reason, and would not be coerced.

Let him look for them if he liked; it would do his head good—better than lying in that stuffy room; if Mary were disagreeable she might go home by herself; but why spoil a delightful afternoon by this sudden fit of prudery? "You are cut out for an old maid, Mary; I am sure you will be one," cried Dollie in her teasing way; she had a notion that Mary would find this speech provoking.

"I shall be what Providence ordains, I suppose," returned Mary equably; but her colour rose a little; perhaps the thrust hurt her, for she said no more; and Dollie had her way—poor Dollie! how bitterly she rued that piece of wilfulness afterwards!

Vespers were just over when they went into the cathedral; the warm fragrance of incense still lingered in the air. Dolly went gliding from one dim chapel to another, till just behind the choir she paused, where the seven red lamps swung before the tiny altar; and then she sat down and fell into an odd jumble of devotion. She had a notion that she was meditating in the orthodox way—till she began thinking of her mother, poor child, and grew a little wistful and dewy. She was wondering how she looked, and if she were dull, and whether the rooms in Abercrombie Road would seem very small and shabby when she got back, when, all of a sudden, the harsh creaking of a chair near her made her start—for she had thought herself alone in her snug corner.

She started still more when she found her-

self suddenly accosted. The chapels were dark and gloomy—no one was passing. Mary was somewhere in the nave, where there were lights and people. Poor little Dollie felt sadly frightened by the tall shabby man, who seemed to rise so abruptly out of the ground.

"Pardon me if I startle you, mademoiselle," said a voice in excellent French, "that I make bold to address you,—but I am in a little difficulty."

"I have nothing for you—not even a centime,—I have forgotten my purse; please go away," said Dollie, feeling rather like the rabbit in the boa-constrictor's case—longing to get up and make her escape, but paralysed under the bold eager eyes.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, it is not alms that I require;" and there was an angry flush on the man's face. Dollie looked at him again, and this time her dislike increased. She remembered him now; he was in the little chapel at St. Jacques when they had looked at the tomb of Ferry de Gros, and Mary had seemed anxious to avoid him—"An ill-looking

man," she had whispered as they hurried out, —could it be that he had followed them here?

She had made a mistake in treating him as a beggar; he was shabby, it was true, with a threadbare sort of respectability, but he had the accent of a gentleman; his face might almost be called handsome, but for its dissipated look, but its dark, lowering look of anger at her words nearly frightened Dollie out of her wits. She began edging slowly away from him, but he followed her, hat in hand.

"Arretez, chère demoiselle," he said beseechingly; "it is only an address I want. I am a stranger here, and they say the good lady of the chateau is benevolent to all who need her bounty. I will not trouble you, mademoiselle; I will tell my own story to the lady herself; her name is Reid—is it not so?" —with a keen searching look at trembling Dollie. "She is the lady of the chateau, n'est ce pas?—or is it another name?"

"No, it is Reid; but what do you want with her? She is an invalid—she cannot see you," replied Dollie, plucking up a little spirit when it was too late.

"An invalid! and her name Reid!—bon!—le chateau de St. Aubert, n'est ce pas?" Dollie nodded, by way of getting rid of him, and to her great relief her Frankenstein suddenly made her a low mocking bow and turned on his heel.

Dollie drew a long breath, and then nearly ran into the arms of a gentleman coming round the choir, and drew herself up with a stiff little apology, and saw Mr. Lyndhurst's grave face.

"I knew I should find you here, Miss Maynard. What imprudence!" he began; "how very wrong! I hardly thought Mary capable of such impropriety." But this little lecture was frustrated by downright astonishment, for there was Dollie, panting and breathless and clinging to his arm—actually clinging to him —Grey Lyndhurst.

"Oh, don't scold—don't say anything disagreeable," half sobbed Dollie. "I have had such a fright! A horrid man has been talking to me; and it was so dark and lonely, and I had such dreadful thoughts that he would murder me, perhaps for my gold chain, and

—and——" and here Dollie poured out her story into Mr. Lyndhurst's ear.

He seemed nearly as shocked as Dollie herself. "What imprudence, those two young girls wandering about Lesponts at this hour of the evening!" he muttered to himself; but he did not reiterate his scolding. On the contrary, he was very kind to the poor little thing—soothing and laughing at her by turns, and acting in quite a surprising way, for he said "you foolish child" once; and then coloured up in the darkness at the idea of taking such a liberty; but Dollie never noticed it; she was too glad of his protection, and when they found Mary, who had been having a semi-doze in her chair, they all three went happily home.

Bertie had not arrived, and they sat down to dinner without him. Nothing was said about Dollie's fright in the cathedral; Mrs. Reid had lectured them in a quiet way for their late wandering. She had felt nervous about them, and so had Charlotte; and then Grey had volunteered to go out and look for them.

Dollie hung down her head and looked very

foolish over the well-merited rebuke, but Mary said bluntly that they had been very thoughtless, and that they would never, never stay out so late again. And then Grey struck in in a good-humoured way, and the opportunity was lost. A different topic occupied them at dinner. A Flemish lady, with whom Charlotte was very intimate, had met with an accident, and her husband had sent round to the chateau begging her assistance.

Charlotte had been down to the Rue d'Equerre once already, and she announced her intention of going again after dinner to sit with the invalid.

"Poor Madame Dubarry!" she said; "she is in a sad state of suffering, and her husband is old and deaf, and no manner of use. I shall take Romany, and be back before you retire, ma Tante."

"To-morrow will do; surely you need not go down to the Rue d'Equerre to-night," remonstrated Mrs. Reid. But it was no use; Charlotte was bent on having her way. She must see her dear Hortense before she slept.

Mary would look after "la Tante." They

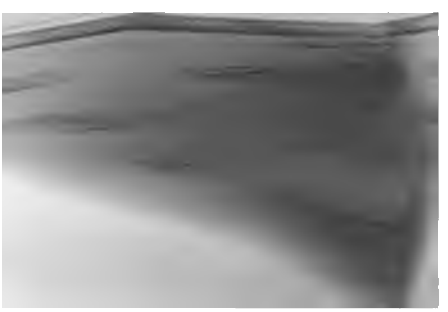
would all do excellently well, but her presence was imperatively needed in the sick-room, as Fanchette had "les nerfs," and was of little use.

Mrs. Reid smiled; she knew well of old that it was no good reasoning with Charlotte when she had once made up her mind. "Come back quickly," she said cheerfully, as Charlotte gaily waved her adieux. "That is a good little creature," she said, as she took up her knitting; "her faults are all on the surface. She is giddy and frivolous, and will never make her mark in the world, but at the bottom there is the woman's heart."

"She seems very devoted to you," returned Mary.

"Yes, she is very good to me, and I find her very useful; but we are an ill-assorted pair. Charlotte has no mind; she never opens a book,—never does anything but trot about the house and chatter. The jingle of her keys is her only music; a new fashion in dress her chief relaxation; she is so perfectly brainless, yet so amiable, that I find myself talking to her as a child."

"She is very young for her age."



"Yes, poor Charlotte! and yet in spite of all her clinging to youth, the wrinkles and grey hair must come one day. Now, Dollie, my dear, we are ready for some of my favourite songs; and to-night Grey must turn over for you, while Mary shows me the new stitch for my couvre-pied."

Dollie rose from her footstool rather reluctantly. It was hard to leave the warm circle of fire-light, and go away into the dim distance with only Mr. Lyndhurst. It was one thing to enjoy his protection in the cathedral, but quite another to have him leaning against the piano, watching her, and finding fault with her songs.

So she showed her gratitude for past favours by present pettishness. Nothing was right; the lights, or the music stool, or the book rest; the songs he selected were old as the hills, and she was tired to death of singing them. Grey was obliged to take his pleasure sadly, with a good many rebuffs; he smiled to himself a little under his moustache, for he was amused at her childishness. He had no idea that Dollie was finding the evening slow without Bertie's

lazy fun, and that she was venting her ill-humour on his brother.

"Was that the hall-door?" asked Mrs. Reid presently, as a cold draught penetrated through the salon. "I suppose Bertie has come back; it cannot be Charlotte yet. Go, my dear," she continued, addressing Mary; "ask Justine or Ursula to see that some food is prepared for him in the salle-à-manger."

Mary obeyed, nothing loth; for what can be dearer to a woman than to minister to the man she secretly loves? Such ministry forms a part of the sacrament of love. She hurried out full of her mission, and with her eyes already shining with welcome, and stopped disappointed, to find Justine in angry altercation with a shabby-looking man, who had just stepped past her into the hall.

"Mademoiselle, help me to exclude this ill-conditioned person," cried Justine in a frightened voice. "It was Monsieur Bertie, I said to myself, when I threw open the hall-door. Stop, monsieur; you shall not go any farther. Madame is in that salon, and no one is suffered to intrude on her; she is ill. Oh! the

monster—the rude person," as the intruder pushed unceremoniously past her and Mary, and marched straight to the door of the salon.

"Pardonne," he returned, looking round at them with a gleaming smile, half triumphant and half malicious. "Madame knows me, and I know madame. There is no need of your polite introduction," and he turned the handle and walked in.

Dollie was singing, but the notes died away in her throat as she looked towards the opening door in expectation of Bertie's tall figure. "Oh, the man! the man!" she gasped, and clutched Grey's arm again in her sudden terror. "That dreadful man, and oh, look, look," pointing towards Mrs. Reid's chair.

Grey disengaged himself though with difficulty, and hurried forward. They might well look; even the intruder paused for a moment, paralysed by the sight of the rigid figure in the fauteuil.

Mrs. Reid was sitting bolt upright, grasping the two sides of her chair; her face was drawn and grey; her eyes fixed in sudden horror;

the grey hair, the gleaming eyes, the terribly-constrained attitude, made up a sad spectacle.

"Walter!" was hissed rather than spoken through the pallid lips. "This my son Walter!"

"Well, it is long since we met, mother; it seems hard for a mother and a son to be so long parted, does it not?" returned the intruder, advancing a little into the room. He spoke with a bold flippancy, but his manner was ill-assured and uneasy. "I have been looking for you some time, but I could never discover where you had hidden yourself until by good luck I hit on this young lady in the cathedral," nodding his head at Dollie, "and she, like a good little soul, set me on your track."

No answer; only the same fixed stare, as of one who sees an apparition; only at the sound of his voice a sort of convulsive trembling passes over the rigid frame.

"Let me speak," cries Dollie, pushing past them, and kneeling down at Mrs. Reid's feet. Mary had already drawn one of the cold hands into hers, and was chafing it tenderly. "It

was all my fault. I was frightened, and how could I know this dreadful man was your son. Send him away, some one," continued the excited girl, facing round on them; "nobody wants him, not even his poor mother. Turn him out of the house, Mr. Lyndhurst; he knows he has no business here."

"I think you had better go," returned Grey sternly. "There is no knowing what mischief may happen if you stand there any longer; go out of the hall-door, and I will come out and speak to you presently."

"Thank you, Mr. Grey Lyndhurst, and you too, my young lady," replied the man sneeringly, "but there is no need of your interference here. You won't get me to leave this house until I have done my business, and as for turning me out, you had better try," with a withering look at Grey's slight figure; "you might find some little difficulty in doing so;" and he squared his shoulders, and planted his feet more firmly on the rug.

"Oh for Bertie's thews and sinews!" sighed Grey; "he would be a match for him. If you are a man, look at that poor face, and go,"

he said more mildly; for by any means they must get rid of him.

"Look here, mother," said Walter coaxingly, quite ignoring Grey and the others, and advancing a few steps nearer; only she tore her hand from Mary's and waved him away, still looking at him with the same awful stare in her eyes.

"What! won't you let me come a little nearer? Is that the way to receive the prodigal son? No fatted calves! nothing of that kind here;" and then he looked at them half sulkily, half abashed, and a fit of coughing stopped him.

He did not look much like a repentant prodigal, this miserable Walter Reid, standing there with his dark lowering face, on which were stamped the traces of many evil passions. Grey noticed with something like pity that the large frame was gaunt and wasted; the face had once been beautiful with a young man's beauty, but now it was pinched and haggard, and almost bloodless; the very sound of his cough was ominous, and when he wiped his lips, Grey noticed a faint red tinge on his handkerchief.

"Comė, mother," he said again when the paroxysm had passed. "You might come round a little now, for I am pretty nearly done for; you may take my oath of that; you might say a word or two to a poor fellow who is cursedly down on his luck."

"Speak to him and tell him to go," whispered Mary. "Dear Mrs. Reid, we are all round you; we will not let any one harm you; tell him to go; he will mind you."

Then she essayed to speak. "That my boy—my boy Walter!" she said pointing to the shabby, disreputable figure before her; "that my son—my only son!" and then before they could reach her, she threw up her arms wildly, and before Mary could spring forward, she had fallen on the rug, and lay with her grey hairs grovelling at the feet of her wretched son.

When Bertie returned later on, he found empty rooms and a disordered household; every one was flying about; no one had time to attend to him.

Dollie came down to him by-and-by with

pale cheeks and swollen eyes, and her pretty hair all in confusion. Bertie was poking the fire rather stormily; the sparks were flying out here and there; he was tired and hungry, and no one seemed to remember the fact. Something had happened, but none of the servants seemed to know what it was all about. Grey had gone for the doctor; Ursula to fetch Charlotte. Justine was with her mistress.

"Mary sent me down to you; she heard your step; she cannot leave Mrs. Reid," said Dollie very demurely. "Oh, how cold the room is! the fire is getting low, and the salle-à-manger is worse; it was like a vault when I crossed it just now. Mary says you must be cold and hungry; she wants me to ask Katchen to get you something to eat."

"Dear Mary! she never forgets any one," thought Bertie gratefully; then aloud, "Let us go to Katchen by all means; it will be warmer there, and you can tell me everything by-and-by."

"Katchen has the catarrh, so she says, and has gone off to bed; but I daresay I shall find you something. Sit by the stove and warm

yourself, while I go into the larder; there are the remains of a chicken, I know, and some gâteau."

The kitchen looked bright and cheerful; the stove was open, and the firelight played on the yellow walls and red brick floor; the brass stew-pans gleamed like polished mirrors; long bunches of sweet-smelling herbs dangled from the old rafters.

Bertie coiled himself up on an oaken bench beside the fire, and watched Dollie, well pleased, as she flitted to and fro. She had covered the tray with a snow-white napkin. She had found cheese-cakes, some stewed pears, last of all she had the chocolate pot in her hands. "Mary says I am to make you comfortable," she said shyly, when at last the little feast was ready, and Bertie prepared to do justice to it.

"This is nectar and ambrosia! You might be Hebe catering for the old Olympic deities!" cried Bertie, as she placed the foaming beverage beside him. "Now, sit down beside me, Hebe, and tell me about everything," went on Bertie cordially, doing his best to be grate-

ful, and not wish in his heart that it were Mary and not Dollie beside him.

Dollie was very glad to obey him; it was rather a pleasant novelty in her existence to be called Hebe, and to have to minister to such an Adonis. "Mary told me to make him comfortable," she said, fortifying herself with a sense of duty, as Bertie, after his manner, looked at her with clear affectionate eyes. It was a long story, and he had quite finished his repast before she had ended it.

"Poor soul!" muttered Bertie compassionately, for he was very soft-hearted, "it must have been some sort of fit, or perhaps a stroke of paralysis."

"We have not heard the doctor's report yet," returned Dollie with a shudder. "Your brother says it was a fit, and that she has had them before; Charlotte told him so. Was it not a pity Charlotte was away? Poor Mary was so frightened! but she did all she could for the poor thing."

"And that wretched man—what became of him?" asked Bertie.

"That is the strangest part of all," returned

Dollie. "When he saw what had happened, he gave a sort of groan, and began to shake all over; when they had carried her to her room, he let Mr. Lyndhurst lead him by the arm; he made no resistance when your brother opened the outer door. I think he must have gone out with him, for I heard voices in the courtyard."

"It is a horrible affair," muttered Bertie. "He is down on her track like a bloodhound, whenever he is out of pocket. Poor creature! one must forgive her all her cutting little speeches after this;" and then they were both silent.

"What are you two doing?" said Grey, suddenly appearing at the door, and regarding the scene before him with unmixed astonishment. There was the supper tray, the fragrant smell of hot chocolate; Bertie stretching himself before the fire, and Dollie in her green dress, with a napkin pinned over it to keep it clean, standing by the stove looking at him. "Do you know it is past eleven, and that Mary is asking for you," went on Grey in a slightly constrained voice.

"How is Mrs. Reid? Is Charlotte come home?" questioned both eagerly.

"Yes; and the doctor has just left. It was a fit, as I said, but she is a little better now. Mary and Charlotte mean to watch her to-night. Mary would like to speak to you for a moment in your own room," he continued, addressing Dollie; and the shade on his countenance deepened, as he closed the door after her, and sat down opposite his brother.

For Bertie had said, "Good-night, Hebe," in a loud, cheerful voice, and Dollie had waved her hand to him and had run out of the room without noticing Grey.

CHAPTER XII.

"I KNEW I COULD TRUST THAT FACE."

MARY was standing by the stove, looking sad and thoughtful, as Dollie entered. She raised her head at the sound of the hasty footsteps. "How long you have been, dear Dollie," she said wearily; "I could not have waited much longer, and I wanted to say good-night before I went in to Charlotte, and to hear all you have to tell me;" and Mary's pale cheeks flushed a little; her eyes looked expectant.

"Oh, there is nothing to tell," replied Dollie carelessly, stretching her white arms over her head with an utter *abandon* of fatigue. She was tired and excited with all the miserable events of the day, and the remembrance of the last hour stirred her with a curious thrill of pleasure. She had done as she was

bidden to do; but there was no reason why Mary should catechise her quite so closely. "There is nothing to tell; I made him comfortable, and he is warmed and fed to his heart's content. So you need not keep Charlotte waiting," finished Dollie, who was in one of her contradictory moods.

"But how did he take it? He must have been so shocked and sorry," persisted Mary patiently but wistfully. She had hoped Bertie would have sent her some message, some little word to cheer her during her long vigil. Could it be that her name had not been mentioned between them?

"He had his supper before he let me speak, and that gave him strength to support it," replied Dollie half mischievously and half crossly. Mary had no right to question her like this; if Bertie and she were engaged, she could hardly have taken more upon herself. "Of course he was sorry, but it did not spoil his appetite. I never saw him enjoy his food more," continued naughty Dollie, who was well aware that poor Bertie had not tasted food for seven or eight hours.

Mary sighed, but she was too gentle to retaliate. "Good-night, dear," she said mildly; "I did not mean to trouble you; thank you for taking care of him so nicely. I daresay you are very tired." And then she kissed her and left the room. Dollie's conscience smote her at the kind kiss and words. Poor Mary! she need not have disappointed her; if she had chosen she could have remembered all sorts of nice little things to have told her; but it was too late to call her back now, and Dollie went to bed, ashamed and discomfited, as though she had done some mean thing, and with a chill feeling of incipient jealousy at her heart, though not for worlds would Dollie have pleaded guilty to such a feeling. But comfort came to Mary nevertheless; for Bertie was lingering outside the door, to waylay her on her passage across the corridor.

He had his chamber candlestick in his hand, for he had made his fatigue an excuse for bidding his brother a hasty good-night; and as he stood there with his fair hair rumpled and standing in a sort of wild halo round his

and the flame of the candle casting

golden gleams over it, he looked like some great glorified angel to Mary's dazzled eyes.

"Oh, Bertie, were you waiting for me?" she exclaimed, and her eyes began to shine with pleasure. If only Dollie could have seen them then!"

"Well, I wanted to say good-night, you know. Thank you for sending down Miss Maynard to look after me. She was such a clever neat-handed sort of Phillis to cater for a fellow; but I would rather have had you, you know," blurted out Bertie, moved to demonstrativeness by something he saw in Mary's face; that made her blush and dimple.

"Oh, Bertie!" she said, looking rosy and almost pretty; for though every one loved Mary's face, it depended solely on its expression for beauty.

"Well, of course I would! As though you did not know that! as though I should not prefer talking to you to a dozen Miss Maynards! Not but what she is a nice little thing though," put in Bertie, with a vivid remembrance of Hebe with the chocolate-pot in her hand. "And so you are going to sit

up all night. Poor Aunt Mary! how tired you will be!" and Bertie's voice softened into tenderness.

"Oh, I don't mind. I am used to night-nursing," returned Mary, feeling suddenly brisk and rested. This was what she wanted —a few kind words from Bertie to think over in the night. "Don't you recollect the weeks and months I had with poor Aunt Emma? I have served my apprenticeship. Charlotte has no idea what a first-rate nurse I am," she went on cheerfully.

"Every one knows how awfully good you are," was the reply. "There is not another person in the whole world fit to hold this candle to you," continued Bertie, rumpling his hair still more, between sleepiness and a desire to say something specially strong and lover-like. Perhaps its strength somewhat embarrassed Mary, for though she laughed and blushed, she held out her hand rather quickly, saying that she must not keep Charlotte waiting any longer. If her fingers tingled somewhat from his warm pressure, it could hardly be helped.

"I wonder how many years it will be before I shall dare to say what I have to say," thought Bertie rather ruefully as he turned away. "Eighty pounds a year is not much to offer a girl, and Mary hasn't even as much as that; but if I keep her waiting a dozen years, she won't have anything to say to any other fellow. I'll stake my life on that;" and a glow came over the young man's face as he thought how, in the years to come, he would win his bonnie Mary!

Mary had need of some cordial to strengthen her for her work; for a long terrible night of watching was before her.

The attack had been followed by utter collapse and exhaustion, and a corpse-like figure, grey in hue and with closed sunken eyes, lay stretched among the pillows. Mary took her place beside it, while Charlotte, shivering and crying to herself, withdrew to the arm-chair beside the stove.

Mary smiled a little at the somewhat incongruous figure heaped up in the cosy chair. Charlotte wore a pink robe de chambre, adorned with all sorts of delicate puffings and finishes.

She had tied a lace mouchoir over her hair, and had a large green fan in her hand, which she fluttered incessantly. She had brought in a whole array of silver-topped bottles of essences; before the night was over, all sorts of different perfumes steeped the atmosphere. Mary detected lavender water, eau de cologne, attar of rose, and wood violet. There was even once a subtle fragrance, somewhat spicy like sandal-wood, against which Mary's olfactory nerves secretly protested. Charlotte had recourse to them between her brief nodding naps. "I am not asleep, but I keep my eyes shut on account of the light," she said now and then in a loud whisper, startling Mary in her open-eyed reverie.

Poor Mary! In spite of her secret fund of happiness, the night was very long and oppressive. It was weary work sitting there, watching that still figure in its death-like lethargy. It was almost a relief when, towards morning, there were indications of reviving life—low mutterings and restless movements of the arms, the lifting of the heavy eyelids, and the vacant, prolonged stare at the opposite

wall. The faint cold gleam of morning was just penetrating through the unclosed window, before Mary could see that she was recognised; but even then the eyes were still dilated and restless; memory and thought were still helplessly confused.

"Another bad dream," she muttered, as Mary applied a restorative, and then gently laid her down and covered her over, smoothing the soft silvery hair that strayed so wildly over the pillow; but the covering was thrown aside, and the cold hand clutched Mary's.

"Who is that in the arm-chair?" she whispered. "Charlotte, oh poor Charlotte! we will not wake her; she is not as young as she used to be, and she needs rest, poor little woman! You stay beside me, my dear; I like your face, I like your face," she went on drowsily; but Charlotte, hearing her name, sprang up, knocking against the fireirons, and disturbed her.

"Here I am, auntie; I was not asleep. I had only got my eyes shut; ask Mary;" and Charlotte winked and blinked her blue eyes, and tried hard not to yawn and not to look as she felt—a very washed-out, weary little person,

with all sorts of lines and puckers showing in her tired face—not as young as she used to be, indeed!

"Hush!" remonstrated Mary, for her hand was still tightly grasped, and she saw a greyer tint on Mrs. Reid's face. "The noise has frightened her," she whispered; "and you know Dr. Arnaud says perfect quiet is the only chance. There is no one here; it is only Charlotte and I," she continued soothingly, for Mrs. Reid had begun to look wild again.

"Another of them, and another of them,—how many more bad dreams?" she went on again, with a low mutter and indistinctness, sometimes waking into coherence. "Mary, look here. I can trust you, Mary. I have watched you both; and though she is a dear child, I know which will be the grander woman by-and-by, only you must not spoil everything by having him. I won't have it, I tell you; it is feeble—monstrous nonsense—a girl's dream—a delusion—promise me, promise me, Mary."

"Dear Mrs. Reid, what am I to promise you?" but Mary thrilled a little under the cold

touch, the vague mysterious words. What could she mean? What was the oppressed brain tracking now? Could she be thinking of Bertie? But even as she doubted and wondered the mood changed.

"Early morning, fine and windy, and Marmaduke has gone out hunting. Why don't they bring me my baby? Nurse, where is my boy, my bonnie laughing boy?" And then she sat up in bed and stretched out her arms; and the palms of her hands quivered, and the fingers were all wide and outspread with eagerness. But Mary caught her in her arms and laid her down.

"Oh, hush, my poor dear," she said half sobbing.

"Hush, yes hush! my baby is asleep," went on the desolate creature, sinking among the pillows again with a contented sigh. "All night long I have him here; I can feel his little cheek against mine. I hold his warm rosy feet in my hand. My baby, my baby, my only one!"

Her voice became low and indistinct, and the women begun to give each other frightened

looks. Dr. Arnaud had warned them of this. "She will rouse but not to reason," he had said. "When that comes all will be over with her. You know what I told you," he had continued, turning to Charlotte, who had wept and wrung her hands. "Another blow—another shock—and she will not recover from it. Perfect quiet, absolute stillness—perhaps that may be her only chance; but—but——" the little doctor dare not trust himself to say more.

"Dear auntie! ma pauvre Tante! try to go to sleep," exclaimed Charlotte, leaning over her and patting her shoulder; but the vague wanderings were not to be checked.

They could hear the household moving now. Presently there were faint taps at the dressing-room door, and little whispered talks with Charlotte. Mary heard Dollie's and Grey's and lastly Bertie's voice, and then Charlotte disappeared to change her costume, and have breakfast, and give her orders, leaving poor Mary to drink her solitary cup of coffee in haste, while she looked out drearily on the leafless avenue, and listened to the faint broken mutterings of

the invalid. It was a relief when Dr. Arnaud entered, and shared her watch for a time.

He was a small brown-faced man, with smooth shaven grey hair and a dark moustache, and his figure had a neat martial build about it; his eyes were shrewd and keen, and as he stood by his patient's bedside he cast sundry inquisitive glances at the pale-faced girl who stood dangling her eye-glasses beside him. Evidently he found her reliable, and suitable to his purpose, for, after some minutes of reflection, he beckoned her to the window, and began to talk in the short abrupt sentences that Dr. Arnaud generally used.

"Mademoiselle is not the nurse?" interrogatively.

"No, monsieur, I am only a friend; perhaps I should say a connection of Mrs. Reid."

"So—an inhabitant of the chateau, n'est ce pas?"

"Only temporarily, monsieur. I am staying here with another English girl."

"But mademoiselle has nursed before; she is not unused to sickrooms; one sees that at a glance;" and the little doctor bowed and

shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, I read you thoroughly; who is there that could deceive Pierre Arnaud? "Mademoiselle has served her noviciate—is it not so?" fixing her with his small sharp eyes.

"Alas! yes, monsieur. I once nursed an aunt who was a great sufferer for many months."

"And alone?"

"Nearly so, except for the help of an old servant."

"And you were with her when she died?"

"I have seen many people die," returned Mary simply. "I have no horror of death, Dr. Arnaud. I have laid old people and little children in their coffins, and have felt as though I were only composing them for a long sleep."

"Bon!" ejaculated the little man; "I knew I could trust that face; it is reliable; one can confide in it. Mademoiselle Morell is nervous and excitable," he continued; "she has the good heart, the sensibilities, but one must not lean on her too hard. A pressure—an emergency —a complication—and pouf—her wits will be

flying here and there;" and he threw his hands out with a significant gesture.

"What would you have me do?" asked Mary, feeling that a crisis was impending that would need all her energies.

"Everything—all that is to be done; take the command; this is your territory," sweeping his arm round as though to embrace the four walls.

"I!" returned Mary shrinkingly. "Miss Morell is twenty years older; she has the right, monsieur. I must not take so much upon myself."

"Bon! Je vous entends bien. We will make all that right. I have my reasons. I nominate you as nurse; this is your patient, and on no account must you leave these two rooms—on no account," speaking more decidedly, as Mary looked at him and still hesitated.

"And Miss Morell?"

"Mademoiselle will, of course, help you. Justine also, if you need her, for we must not wear you out. It will not be for long, poor soul! the end may come at any time; le bon Dieu alone knows when. But quiet, perfect

tranquillity, soothing when her wanderings become excited,—cela va sans dire,—you understand me, mademoiselle ?"

"Perfectly, monsieur. But is there no hope ?"

"While there is the life,—you know the rest. Poor madame! she has long been afflicted with an incurable disease, and when you add to this a shock, a broken heart, one dare not hope too much;" and then with a few more shrugs, and adding some straightforward directions, with a promise of returning before evening, Dr. Arnaud took up his curly-brimmed hat, and with another glance at his patient left the room.

Poor Mary! she gave one little sigh as she thought of Bertie downstairs, of the walks and the pleasant fireside talks she would miss, and then she put self and the other dearer self resolutely aside, and girded herself up for the present duty.

For Mary was religious — she was not simply acquainted with religion, neither did she keep it for Sundays, and leave the week-days to take care of themselves; as far as she

understood it—and being only a woman, she was liable to make mistakes—she tried honestly and conscientiously to do her duty.

Perhaps she was a little too apt to think that duty must necessarily lie on the path of self-sacrifice; not that she was morbid and thought pleasant things were wrong, but noble acts were magnified in her mind and assumed a largeness and purity of motive that did not always belong to them. Humble-minded herself, she thought the best of everybody—but Maurice was exalted as her hero par excellence —a sort of halo of incipient saintliness surrounded him. In spite of Janet's foreboding, she gloried in his work, his enthusiasm, his forgetfulness of all but his vocation. Strange that a woman of Mary's strong character, who could be a helpmeet to a man like Maurice, should centre all her future hopes, her girlish budding affections, on such an one as Bertie! but so it was.

What was there in Bertie's character to rouse such steadfast faith in him? such implicitness of belief in the underlying goodness in his nature, which in spite of his faults and

vacillation, his inertness and lymphatic purposes, made her cleave to him with such tender fidelity? Could mere beauty—and he was as beautiful as a young Adonis — have won a woman like Mary?

Dollie might be touched and attracted by his Adonis-like attributes, but hardly Mary; but yet here she was — a woman weak in nothing else but this—but glorying nevertheless in her weakness, and ready with all her strength and all her courage to fight for him, and with him, if it should be against the whole world.

So she prayed her little prayer against selfishness, and tried to be glad that work had come to her in this foreign land, and that others had recognised her usefulness; and then, leaving thought alone, which is much the best way when there is room for regret, she took refuge in action, and, summoning Justine to her aid, she soon had the sickroom arranged with exquisite neatness, Charlotte's essences removed, and a few autumn flowers arranged in the purple vases.

When Charlotte returned, looking rather

crestfallen and subdued after her interview with the doctor, Mary went up to her at once, and spoke to her most affectionately but firmly.

"It was not her doing," she said; "that Dr. Arnaud had given such arbitrary orders; and she thought it rather hard upon Charlotte. You see Maurice and I are so used to nursing," she continued apologetically; "there is such terrible sickness in the parish sometimes, and one gets hardened and used to scenes of sufferings. Not really hardened, perhaps," finished Mary, correcting herself in her conscientious manner—for she always took care to avoid anything like exaggeration in speech; and had she not often come home and cried bitterly over ills that she had no power to remedy?

"Oh, it is all right," returned Charlotte, whose ready tears were already flowing. "Of course you will do better than I. Dr. Arnaud knows that. I do not mind your taking the lead in nursing ma pauvre Tante. How could I be such a monster of selfishness? it is only"—and here the poor little creature buried her face in her handkerchief—"it is

only — only that he should have such an opinion of me, after all he has said!"

Charlotte cried so, and her eyes were so sad, that Mary got quite mystified. It was not until afterwards—when Charlotte got composed enough to indulge in one of her favourite whispered confidences—that she got an inkling on the subject.

For she found out then that Dr. Pierre Arnaud was a widower, with two little brown-faced boys in frilled trousers and smart plaid tunics, who went by the names of Gaston and Jean Jacques; and that he lived in the great house with the green jalousies in the Rue d'Equerre; and that la chère Hortense was his sister.

"He is a very intelligent physician, and has a large practice among the best people of Lesponts," whispered Charlotte. "Poor Madame Arnaud was a charming person. I knew her well, but she was older than he—she must have been quite middle-aged before he married her; but she had distinguished manners and a good dot—so perhaps it does not matter. Frenchmen have such different

ideas—they are all for les convenances, and for matrimony by arrangement."

"Poor Dr. Arnaud! it must be very bad for him and his poor little boys," observed Mary sympathetically, who had taken rather a liking to the brown-faced military-looking little doctor.

"Oh yes, it is so triste," replied Charlotte eagerly. She was looking at all Mary's arrangements in the dressing-room, and fingering the pillows of the little temporary couch that had been fitted up for their comfort. "That great house, and those empty rooms, and no one but old Jeannette to look after the dear boys; and Jean Jacques, such a delicate child! He talks to me about them sometimes, and about himself too. He says we English-women have such sensibility, are so full of sympathy," continued Charlotte, with one of her old dimples.

Mary began to comprehend now. She wondered if Dr. Arnaud thought Charlotte had a dot, or could he really be taken by her youthful airs and fussy good-nature? She was not bad-looking; she was quite young and piquante some-

times. Mary understood now why Charlotte always slipped away to make her toilette before he arrived. The braided dresses, the scented mouchoir, the neat little brodequins were all for him. "She has forgotten her old lover," thought Mary, as she composed herself on the dressing-room couch for an hour or two's rest, while Charlotte and Justine kept watch. Could she really have loved him? and with the one-sidedness of youth Mary blamed poor Charlotte in her heart for thinking of a living Frenchman, while her dead lover lay under the green turf of his foreign grave, not making allowance for the limp clinging sensibilities that made loneliness and a single life repugnant to Charlotte's nature.

"If Bertie were never to tell me that he loved me, if there were no hope for us, and we were never to be married, never to come together in this life, I should care for him all the same, and never want any one else," thought Mary, as she rested her weary head on the pillow; and, to do her and Bertie justice, they were equally sure of each other, and yet no plighted troth had been demanded or given.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOU ARE THE ONE WOMAN IN THE WORLD TO ME."

WHILE Mary slept the sleep of the just, poor Dollie was having a miserable time of it.

Being an honest-hearted little thing, her conscience was still sore with the memory of her past unkindness to her friend; in the spirit of true repentance, she wanted to make it up to Mary, and to atone for her fault by a great deal of extra petting, but no opportunity was vouchsafed to her.

The doctor's orders were stringent; Mary was invisible; when Dollie ventured to turn the handle of the dressing-room door, she was met by a loud "hush" from Charlotte, or "ne faites point tant de bruit, s'il vous plaît, mademoiselle," from Justine; while through the closed curtains that hung over the doorway

between the two rooms, she could see Mary's blue serge dress, as she moved quietly about with an enforced silence of movement that was as far removed from noisiness as it was from lumbering; it could not be said that she either swam or glided, or even tripped lightly across a room, but her walk was like herself, calm, serious, and equable.

She gave Dollie a cheerful nod when she saw her, but took no further notice; and Dollie went downstairs feeling as though matters were very bad indeed. She had no idea before how much she would miss Mary; the spirit of harmony seemed wanting; everything was at sixes and sevens in the chateau; and even the morning-room, their usual resort, looked forlorn and less comfortable than usual. Perhaps Bertie's unaccountable behaviour added to the general dulness; he came down to breakfast looking tired and listless, and his morning greeting was far less cordial than usual, he seemed to have forgotten all about the little Hebe of last night. "How do you do, Miss Maynard?" he said absently. "What a damp chilly morning!" and then he drew his letters

towards him, and said very little more until the end of the meal.

When Charlotte came in to take her late breakfast, and to retail the doctor's orders, Bertie got up and began striding about the room, rumpling his hair and pulling his moustache, or looking out of the window in a restless, perturbed fashion; then he abruptly left the room, and they saw him no more until the middle of luncheon, when he stalked in with a muttered apology for being late, and took his place. Grey's morning had been fully occupied; he had had business letters to write for Charlotte, and some commissions in the town, which he goodnaturedly undertook for her, though he would rather have stayed at home and tried to cheer up Dollie.

That little person spent her solitary forenoon in writing to her mother, and playing with Mark Antony; but during luncheon the rain ceased, and a pale watery brightness, as of coming sunshine began to permeate the room, and Dollie began to feel chirpy again.

"It is quite fine now; it will be a lovely afternoon," she said, looking across at Bertie;

but though he assented he did not take the hint. It was Grey who was watching the girl, and who noticed the wistfulness of her look. Of course he understood her—had he not begun already to read her like a book? "Do you want a walk?" he said eagerly. "Of course Mary and Cousin Charlotte are out of the question, but here we are at your service." Grey did not offer to escort her alone, he was far too keenly alive to the proprieties which hedge in young girls like Dollie, but with both of them it did not matter; and if this illness went on, she could not remain shut up in the chateau without air or exercise. "Why don't you speak up, old fellow," he continued, addressing his brother rather impatiently; and Bertie had no option but to declare that he would be delighted to accompany them, though a closer observer than Dollie might have noticed that he looked decidedly bored.

"Two is company and three is none," says the old adage; and it was certainly true in this case. Neither Grey nor Dollie seemed to enjoy their walk; Bertie hung heavy on their hands; he would not join in the conversation.

When Grey started a very intellectual subject, he said, "I beg your pardon?" or, "What did you say, Miss Maynard?" every time Dollie addressed him; as Grey remarked, "his wits were wool-gathering."

At last, when they got to the bridge at Laeken-water, he suddenly remembered that he had a letter from Sir Charles Howard lying in his pocket that ought to be answered by the evening post.

"Confound it! if it hadn't gone entirely out of my head!" said Bertie, with rather a stronger expletive against his stupidity, under his breath.

"Let us go back; it does not matter about going on farther," returned Dollie good-naturedly, for she saw he was really put out by his own carelessness.

"No, no, I will go alone; I shall do it in half the time; why, your little feet could not keep up with my stride! Grey will bring you back all right by-and-by. I am awfully sorry, you know, but it can't be helped—ta-ta;" and Bertie hurried off without looking once behind him.

They both stood and watched, as the tall grey-coated figure went down the walk with swinging even strides, until the trees hid him, then Dollie suddenly turned and looked over the bridge.

It was the same still piece of landscape that she had once sketched; there were the red roofs and quaint gables, the bridge with the swans sailing under the arches, the trees coming down to the shore, the wide sweep of water with a sunset glow on it.

Down there on the sandy margin Bertie and Mary had stood for ever so long, talking earnestly together. What were they talking about, she wondered; and then they had come back to them, laughing and walking hand in hand, and there had been a happy look in Mary's eyes.

Could it really be that Bertie was in love with Mary. She had hardly thought so; his manners had been too brotherly—too openly affectionate, for that construction to be put on them; and yet, what could his behaviour to-day signify? was he not absent and disagreeable enough even for a lover?

"If I had been a wooden Dollie, he could not have noticed me less," she thought, with aggrieved jealousy. "Well, let him be in love with Mary! who cares?—not I,—only it is a little hard when Mary is not here that he should treat me in this fashion—and after my kindness to him last night!" and a pang crossed Dollie as she remembered the pleasant hour in the old kitchen, and Bertie looking up at her with kind eyes, and with soft words on his lips, as she ministered to him in the firelight.

Poor little Dollie! her fancy was touched, though her heart was as blank as a sheet of white paper—no single name inscribed on it; she was just in that transition state when the surface of her mind might be touched by the physical beauty and winning ways of an Adonis, if not by this Bertie, by some other Bertie—for at eighteen, an aquiline nose, and a pair of expressive grey eyes, and even a stalwart pair of shoulders, will often weigh as heavy in the scale of feminine favour as more moral qualities, kindness and courage and such like. It is later in life when one understands that beauty and worth do not always

go together. Dollie's mind was vexed, but she could not quite comprehend the cause of her vexation, and then by some odd transition her thoughts went travelling homewards—back to the little green parlour in Abercrombie Road; and all at once her cheeks were wet, and a little sob rose in her throat, and before she knew what she was about, the poor child was crying heartily for her mother.

It was very absurd and babyish, and most unexpected on the part of a young lady, who is bound to make herself agreeable to her walking companion. What would Mr. Lyndhurst think of her? And yet, and yet, if Dollie could be only on her old footstool at her mother's feet with her mother's arms round her, and the sad gentle face bent over her, and talk it all out—all the girlish feelings and fancies—for elder wisdom to disentangle and set right; for the grace of confession in such cases is that there should be implicit faith and guidance—why, she could tell her thoughts, her very silliest, to her mother, and never be made ashamed of her youth!

For let elder people be sure of this, that to

win youthful hearts and youthful confidences, it is necessary to stoop the stiff back, and look through the same rose-coloured spectacles from the same point of view, only with extension. Young people are soon weary of standing on tiptoe and trying to get a good look through your more advanced telescope; the wider margins, the grand sweeps of horizon, bewilder and puzzle them; you must stoop and look through their own little paltry glasses before you can coax them to throw them aside; they will use the telescope and be thankful enough for it presently.

Mrs. Maynard had learned this divinely maternal lesson; she had absorbed herself into Dollie, before Dollie recognised the secret influence that was drawing her. She talked, and her mother listened—that was all; perhaps a word of wisdom might be spoken at the end, but it was so disguised, so wrapped up in manifold folds of sweetness, that the counsel was received and digested without repugnance.

But here was Dollie crying,—absolutely crying, with real tears on her cheeks, and a

real choke in her voice; and what would Mr. Lyndhurst think?

Mr. Lyndhurst did not know what to think!

He was utterly baffled and discomfited.

Another time Dollie would have burst out laughing over their ridiculous situation, but she was much too heartily ashamed of herself for that.

Poor Grey! He said, "My dear Miss Maynard!" in a horrified voice; and then he turned his back on her, and looked down at the water, and wondered what on earth he was to say, and what he was to do; and whether she meant to leave off soon, and what in the name of all that was mysterious could it be about? And then he remembered Bertie's abrupt departure, and how Dollie's face fell; and his brow grew very black, and he pulled his moustache irritably, and walked back to her, looking very stiff and quite two inches taller. Dollie saw him coming, and dried her eyes in a frightened way, and tried to speak, and began to laugh, and did both together after a fashion that

horrified Grey still more. Was she going to be hysterical? Here was a pretty position for a young man endowed with more than a usual amount of good sense and propriety—left alone on the bridge of Laeken-water, miles away from the chateau, with a girl who seemed on the brink of hysterics; and if there was one thing Grey dreaded more than another, it was anything bordering on a scene; he was actually getting angry with her.

"Oh, do forgive me, Mr. Lyndhurst," cried Dollie, becoming all at once aware of the blackness, while a little round tear, like a shining globule, fell on her glove. "It is too silly of me; it is absolutely absurd, but it has been so horrid all day, and I do so want my mother."

"Your mother!" Grey's brow cleared like magic; he came a few steps nearer, and looked in her face; perhaps the survey softened him. "Your mother?" he repeated, as though doubtful whether he had heard aright, but his voice took its gentlest tones.

"Oh yes," replied Dollie with a heavy sigh, "I always want her when things are horrid or go wrong. I would give half I possess, not

that that is much," she said, laughing rather faintly at the remembrance of her scanty store of treasures, "just to find her sitting in the chateau when we go back,—my dear darling little mother."

Grey was silent, but his eyes looked kind; he was evidently mollified. "Poor little thing! poor innocent child!" he said to himself; "the tragedy of yesterday has upset her and made her nervous; she was looking pale all luncheon-time; we must take care of her. I forgot how sensitive girls are over these sort of things;" and he began to blame himself very unnecessarily.

Dollie heaved another great sigh, and then she looked down on the water and shivered; his want of response was a little depressing.

"Shall we walk on?" he said, misconstruing the shiver, and like a man finding relief in action. Dollie agreed a little sulkily; she thought him cold and unsympathetic; she had no idea what a sudden storm of feeling was roused in Grey's quiet frame, at the sight of the little tear resting on her glove; he had never seen her cry before, and had no idea any one could do it so prettily.

Grey had seen children cry, and the remembrance of their contortions and puckered faces and swollen eyelids was very displeasing to him. Charlotte too had looked old and plain when she came in that morning with red patches under her eyes, and making up her face into an odd twist as though to force the tears out; but this girl cried so prettily—there were no twists, no contortion of features in her case; her tears brimmed over her cheeks and came rolling down where they would, and the redness of eyes only made her look more pathetic.

Grey meditated on this for a long time; then he revolved the whole thing in his mind, and cudgelled his brains to find something soft and pleasant to say; while Dollie walked rather proudly by his side, thinking him the coldest and stiffest young man that she had ever known.

"I think nothing can replace a mother—her love is so perfectly unique," he said at last, breaking the silence somewhat awkwardly. He rather derided himself for this bald piece of sentiment afterwards, but Dollie was struck

by it, and thought the truism perfectly original.

"Oh!" she said, brightening up, "I am sure there is no one in the world like my mother; no one half so nice, or so pretty, or so good."

"Well, I don't know," returned Grey slowly, for he did not quite agree to this. "I suppose mothers are pretty much alike, that is, every one thinks their own the best;" and he gave a short sigh,—only Dollie did not hear it,—for he still had a vivid remembrance of the beautiful-faced woman who used to kiss him and Bertie in their little cots, and who faded away so slowly and sadly from life while they were still boys. "Anyhow," he continued, rather dryly, "they are never to be replaced."

"Why, that is true!" replied the girl eagerly; "any one can have two wives, but there can only be one mother."

"Two wives!" exclaimed Grey in a tone of perplexity; for a moment flitting ideas of Mormonism and polygamy among the ancients crossed his vision; "I beg your pardon," he said, stopping and staring at Dollie.

"Of course I don't mean two at once," she returned impatiently; another time she would have given a little stamp with her foot, but she was walking decorously beside him, and dare not indulge in any more eccentricity; but how stupid, how very stupid he was! "When one dies, you know, a man can always comfort himself by getting another. Lots of them do it, you know," continued Dollie, with a swift, bird-like nod, and looking very bright and knowing.

Now what business had that stupid little Dollie to drag in wives with the mothers, when no one was thinking of such a thing? Of course if one applies a match to an inflammable substance there will be an explosion, and latent volcanoes will occasionally break forth. For Grey got suddenly very red.

"I suppose some men do console themselves in the way you say," he returned. "I daresay I am different; but it seems to me as though one could only love once in one's life." He spoke in the driest possible voice; no one hearing him would have believed that his feelings were getting too much for him.

But that silly Dollie would not let well alone; she had no idea that she was playing with edge-tools. She only wanted to make him talk a little—to draw him out, in fact—and one subject was as good as another. So she went on—"Yes, but she might die early, you know, when you were quite young."

"Then I would have all the longer to mourn for her," blurted out Grey, feeling that his time was come, and that there was no help for it—that invisible hands were pushing him over the brink without any will or volition of his own; and that, come what might, he would speak there and then. Then he stopped, and they both stopped.

They had reached the little bridge leading to the Béguinage; it was a favourite spot with them, and they had often lingered there to admire the scene. This evening it looked more peaceful than ever, with its ivied gateway and the broad sweep of water, with the low shrubs and pollards coming down to it. Dollie, as was her wont, leaned over the bridge, and looked down on the silvery water. Grey cleared his throat, took a comprehensive glance all round

at the water, the sky, and the long winding path, and then foolishly enough, as it must be owned, he began.

"Look here, Miss Maynard; I want to say something; we have got on this subject oddly enough, and now there is no getting off it. When a man's time is come he must speak, you know." It must be acknowledged that Grey was not talking with much eloquence, but on this subject it is not always possible for a man to be fluent.

"Well?" returned Dollie, with her eyes still fixed on the water; her "well" was not discouraging; it was purely indifferent.

"It is only three weeks since I first met you," went on Grey, with an odd break in his voice, "three weeks to-day; and yet it has come to this, that I know that you are the one woman in the world to me; and so when a man feels that, he ought to speak, you know."

"What do you mean?" cried Dollie, facing round upon him suddenly—she could not believe her ears. There he was, leaning against the bridge with folded arms, speaking in a suppressed, dry sort of voice, but his eyes—at

least they were intelligible enough—their vivid brightness drove Dollie to the water, this time with angry blushes on her cheek. "I don't know what you mean," she said, feeling terribly confused, and ready to cry again.

"I thought I was speaking very plainly," replied Grey. "You are the woman I love, Dollie—Miss Maynard, I mean—and for whose loss I should mourn all my life. I am not like other men, I fancy; I could not love twice, or change the object of my attachment. When I mean a thing once, I mean it for ever," finished Grey, with a sigh that was sufficiently eloquent.

Dollie began to get frightened; she was sure now that he was in earnest.

"But it could not be like that between us, you know," she returned hastily. "Please don't say any more, Mr. Lyndhurst; it frightens me somehow. I am very much obliged to you, and I like you very much, but it could never, never be like that."

"Why not, dear Miss Maynard," he persisted gently, "when I love you so much?"

"But you must not love me; you must not

go on doing it when I tell you not," she returned angrily, for his persistence terrified her. "Oh, what would my mother say, and when I have not known you three weeks;" and Dollie looked utterly shocked.

"Have I been too sudden? Shall I give you time—will you go home and talk to your mother about this? Please do not shake your head so decidedly; remember this is life and death to me."

"But I can't help that," she returned half crying. "I never tried to make you like me,—I never thought of such a thing. It is not my fault if you will go on doing it."

Her childishness made Grey smile in spite of his pain. Why would she not turn and look at him, and see how thoroughly, how entirely he was in earnest? But Dollie did not dare meet those honest eyes again.

"How can I help loving you when I must go on doing it all my life?" he said rather reproachfully. "Have I not told you that once means for ever with me; no, it is not your fault; you have never tried to fascinate me, but from that first evening that I met you on the stair-

case—do you remember it?—I have felt you were different to other women."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried poor Dollie, so dreadfully sorry for him and for herself that she did not know what to say.

"Of course you have made me very unhappy," continued Grey; but he did not feel quite so unhappy as he ought to have felt. On the contrary, he was conscious of an astonishing amount of obstinacy and strength. If he had been in love with her at the beginning, he was ten times more so now; if he could have spoken out all the thoughts of his heart, he would have said as follows:—

"It is no good your trying to escape me, my darling, for there is no escape possible for you. I am a tenacious fellow; what I will I do, and I have willed this with my whole heart and soul.

"You may not like me now, but some day I shall make you; for if prayers are heard in heaven and answered on earth, I shall win you for my wife yet."

But being a slow-tongued man, and shy and embarrassed when his feelings were con-

cerned, he could not say the half of this, but he gave her a shrewd hint of his intention.

"You have made me very unhappy," he said to her; "but as for giving up this, you might as well ask me not to go on living. Of course I will never give it up—or you," he finished under his breath; then aloud, "I suppose there is no one else," with a slight hesitation. Dollie shook her head vehemently, but how she blushed at the very idea!

"And I may hope that you do not actually dislike me?"

"Oh, dear no!" returned Dollie, pleased to be able to say something comforting at last. "I like you very much, and I should like us always to be friends." Why do girls always say that, always try to retain the rejected lover as a friend.

Grey's brow cleared a little at this. He began to see his way.

"Then I may hope to see you sometimes?"

"Oh, of course. I mean, if you like," turning shy again.

"I should like it very much, from time to time," he replied seriously. "I don't want to

lose sight of you, or let you forget me quite, in spite of—of—my repulse just now. Now you must be tired; shall we go home? It is getting quite dark." And Dollie, who was dying to get rid of him, eagerly assented.

Grey was acting very magnanimously. Instead of sulking over his defeat, he was marching off, if not with the honours of war, yet with a good amount of pluck and assurance.

Of course he had been a fool for his pains; of course he had been absurd and hasty. Dollie had never shown him the faintest shade of preference; on the contrary, she had seemed rather to favour Bertie. What business had he to take advantage of her girlish nonsense and turn it into reality after this fashion, and frighten her to death with his clumsy love-making?

And yet he could not be sorry for what he had done; out of the fulness of his heart his mouth had spoken. "When a man feels like this to a girl she has a right to expect him to say it," he said to himself; but the hitch was that Dollie did not expect it, was utterly and entirely taken aback by it.

But this only fanned the flame.

No, he could not be sorry about it; he was a little downcast and anxious, but not more than was good for him. The thin end of the wedge was inserted; she had taken it for granted that she would see him sometimes. He must get his footing in Trevilian Terrace; he must go to work in the good old-fashioned way, and woo Dollie through her mother. It was something to have a purpose in life, something definite for which to work. And so it came about that Grey was not so unhappy, so absolutely wretched, as he walked home by Dollie's side, hardly trying to talk to her, but planning ways and means to secure his cherished plan in the future.

CHAPTER XIV.

FEEDING ON HUSKS.

NEVER was there a more silent walk.

Grey had said his say, and now his lips seemed resolutely compressed into silence; while Dollie walked by his side in the gloaming crying softly to herself, and wishing with all her heart that she had never come to Lesponts, since all these sort of disagreeables were to be the result.

It was a relief to both when the peaked roof and turrets of the chateau came into sight. As they parted in the hall, Dollie flashed one look at him as she ran upstairs. The look mystified Grey, and he pondered over it for many a day. It was proud and yet humble; it seemed to ask forgiveness and to repel sympathy; it seemed to say, "I like

you, but I don't mean to have anything more to say to you." At least so Grey construed its meaning.

As Dollie fled to the refuge of her own room she mentally vowed that nothing should induce her to see Mr. Lyndhurst's face again that night. She could not and she would not sit down to the same table with him.

There was nothing for it but to assume an indisposition that she did not feel. True, her head throbbed, but the throbbing hardly amounted to a headache. When she looked in the glass her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright in spite of her tears. Dollie stamped her foot and shook her head impatiently over the reflected image.

"You tiresome creature!" she muttered, apostrophising herself. "Your looks don't pity you at all; you are not a bit interesting or woe-begone." And then she made her little preparations; for she took off her dress and put on her dressing-gown. It was of the softest and tenderest blue, like Dollie's eyes, and her mother had embroidered it with silken pansies and forget-me-nots, so that it was the

daintiest and most bewitching of garments; and she took down her long fair plaits, and her hair lay on her shoulders in shining masses; and then she leaned back languidly in her chair, and summoning Romany, made her pathetic little request.

She was tired and her head ached—she thought by dint of much thinking that it did ache a little—and she did not want her dinner; would the good Romany bring her a cup of English tea?

Grey looked up involuntarily from his plate when the message was brought to Charlotte, and then he bit his lip and looked down again. Of course he understood it all. He had half hoped that she would have come downstairs, and that things might somehow have resumed their old footing; but perhaps it was too much to expect. He must give her a little time to get over it, and to become used to the idea of a lover. And then perhaps she would cease to shun him; but how empty, how dreary, the room looked without her and Mary! It may be doubted whether he or Bertie felt more forlorn as they sat through the long evening,

pretending to read, but in reality indulging in their own meditations.

If Dollie had wanted her mother before, she wanted her doubly now. Never was there a more homesick little creature. Write to her? Of course she could not write about such things! Fancy her taking up her pen and actually tracing the words: "My dear Mother —Mr. Lyndhurst has just made me an offer and I have refused him"! Why, she blushed to the very tips of her little ears at the idea. Such things were to be whispered under the breath. She could have said it between lights from the footstool at her mother's feet; or if she could have got at Mary she might perhaps have brought herself to say a word or two. Mary's sympathy at the present moment would have been of untold value. She might have hinted her trouble and besought help and guidance; but there was Mary shut up out of all reach, and there was no getting at her.

This evening with all its misery was an epoch in Dollie's life; it was the first time she had been wholly left to her own resources; those hours of solitary self-communing were

not unfruitful of good. She had been brought suddenly to feel the reality and responsibility of her womanhood, and the better and more serious part of her nature was waking up in response. Grey's offer had at least this good effect—it made a woman of Dollie.

She grew ashamed all at once of her trifling dreams and fancies; she took herself to task severely for the pleasure she felt in Bertie's society. "What business have you to think of him at all, when he belongs to Mary?" she said to herself, becoming virtuous all of a sudden; and she determined as long as she stayed at Lesponts that she would keep them both at a distance. There must be something in the air of the place, she thought, to make them all so foolish, and she summoned all her stout English prejudices to her aid, and all sorts of far-fetched pruderies besides, to arm herself against these designing young Britons.

Mary wondered greatly that Dollie did not come to wish her good-night, and half thought of seeking her in her own room, but Bertie frustrated her intention by waylaying her in the corridor again. When he had gone off

with his chamber candlestick, Justine, who had been watching them through a crack of the door, came out and summoned Mary, as madame was growing restless again, and so Dollie was forgotten.

Dr. Arnaud had warned them that they must expect a greater increase of fever and restlessness towards night; the day had passed tolerably quietly, but now there were symptoms of excitement, snatches of frenzied talk, of incoherent wandering, which became louder and more intelligible.

The poor mother had ceased to babble of the baby; it was the boy—the youth Walter—that seemed to haunt her brain. Mary shuddered more than once at the dark revelations hinted in her words. There were agonised prayers to his father to do this or that. "You must not call him that, Marmaduke," she almost screamed once, seizing Mary by the wrist, as she bent over her, "our own boy—our only son, Marmaduke."

"Do you hear me?" she continued in a hoarse whisper; "what is it you answer?—cruel, cruel. What if he were to sink to the

lowest depths of shame?—is he not our son? You are ruining him—you are destroying all his chances. Husband! Do you hear me? —you shall hear me."

Then again, in still more terrible voice: "I have lost him—I have lost them both—where in heaven or earth shall I find them? My husband! my son!" Then again—

"Hush! I am not your mother—you are not Walter—Walter died when he was a baby. Who are you—you standing there? That my son? oh, merciful Heaven, never, never!" and a sudden trembling and horror convulsed her frame.

"Oh, hush, my poor dear, hush!" Mary would say to her, soothing her like a child in her arms until the paroxysms had passed away; but again and again it came. There were wild prayers to Walter to spare her—to have pity on her grey hairs and broken heart; commands that he should go away and seek her no more. "Hide me—hide me from my son; cover me over with earth, and lay me in my grave; only there I shall be safe—only there he will not be able to find me. Call me

Marah," she muttered, "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me;" and so on.

It was a terrible strain on Mary's endurance; Justine and Charlotte were sleeping in an inner room, but the brave girl would not wake them. "It is better for me only to hear all this," she thought; "she is telling all her troubles, poor soul! by-and-by she will be easier;" and she thought of Maurice, and how they had once watched together beside a poor man in brain fever, when his wife had broken down, and how Maurice had commended her for her courage, and told her tenderly that she was a ministering woman—"Martha-like as well as Mary-like," he had said with a smile, "as all true women should be;" and then he had broken off and sighed, and she knew that he was thinking of Janet.

She remembered this; and a vision of the wretched garret, and the sleeping wife, and the poor sufferer tossing on his hard pallet rose before her; and then she wondered what Bertie would have done in such a case, and whether she should ever watch with him beside sick beds in squalid rooms; and then pinched

herself, with a little smile—for she knew she was getting drowsy, and that the mutterings were growing fainter—and prayed that she might keep awake until morning, and drew aside the muslin blind and looked out on the dark avenue; and all at once the memory of sleeping disciples in a moonlit garden came across her. "The flesh is weak; ah, yes! weak enough," she murmured, as she once more seated herself by the bedside.

When Dr. Arnaud came next morning he stepped up to his patient, and examined her long and carefully. Mary answered all his inquiries in a brief business-like way; she was a little faint and giddy, but she hoped that he would not notice it; but he had already drawn his own conclusions from her pale cheeks and heavy eyes.

"Ma foi! but we must not work our best nurse too hard," cried the little doctor. "Come, Mademoiselle St. John, madame is tranquil. Justine and ma bonne amie Meess Morell will keep watch. See, I banish you for some hours' sleep, and you will be like the giant refreshed." And Mary, nothing loth,

let Charlotte cover her up on the chintz couch, where she soon fell into a dreamless sleep.

Dollie meanwhile was facing her ordeal. She could not have headaches for ever; she could not live up in her room, or have Romany bringing up her meals; breakfast was on the table, and she must go downstairs.

She made her entrance into the room rather after the fashion of a naughty schoolgirl, keeping her head down when she shook hands with Mr. Lyndhurst; but as Grey was equally red and shamefaced, it did not matter. They were evidently afraid of each other. Grey did not once address her, he left his brother to wait on her and attend to all her little wants; but his ears were keenly alive to the few shy sentences that dropped from Dollie's lips.

Charlotte did not notice anything amiss—her penetration was never very striking; she kept up a running commentary on things in general that served for conversation. Bertie was much more shrewd in his observation, he looked from Dollie to Grey, and then secretly smiled to himself; there was something in the wind—perhaps he had done them a good turn

leaving them yesterday. What a deep fellow Grey was!—but there, it was no business of his; he had enough to do with his own affairs; and with this reflection he took himself off to find employment for his morning.

Grey looked a little perplexed when his brother left the room; he did not see his way clear; he must speak to her; he must try and find out how she intended to spend her day,—she could not be left wholly to her own resources. But while he was hesitating, Dollie solved the difficulty by marching very stiffly to the door, and then, when she was outside it, by running as fast as she could to her own room, where she bolted herself in for the morning, working a little, and reading a little, and yawning a good deal.

At luncheon things were no better. Bertie made himself as pleasant as he could under the circumstances, but this time there was no hint from Dollie about the propitiousness of the weather. She sat up looking very straight and prim, and talked to Charlotte in little cut-and-dried sentences, that might have been taken at random out of a phrase book, and

which dealt principally at adjectives and prepositions. Grey lifted his eyebrows more than once in secret consternation; never was there such a demure, withering Dollie!

Charlotte's density and fussiness were rather helpful than otherwise. She took no notice of the uncomfortable state of things, and trotted away after luncheon to wake Mary, and take her own afternoon nap, without questioning Dollie as to what she meant to do with herself.

It was a lovely afternoon, the sun shone out of a cloudless blue sky; a fresh wind, breathing rather of September than November, blew the dry leaves into little eddies and heaps. Dollie looked out of her window and longed; then she remembered the bridge by the Béguinage and blushed; finally she put on her hat, and slipped along the corridor and down the stairs like a little mouse, and closed the door so softly behind her that Grey, who was putting on his gloves in the morning room, never heard her, and thought she was still a captive in her own apartment.

And so it came to pass that, strolling up the avenue in the direction of the cemetery,

he discovered with a little shock of pleasure and surprise that the grey dress before him belonged to Dollie, and that he was quietly following in her footsteps as a sort of guardian angel—invisible and watchful.

The fancy pleased him, and he resolved to hold on his way; but what if she were to turn and discover that he was following her? that idea was alarming. He thought, after all, that he would go back.

But lo and behold, as he hesitated, and as he watched with far-off admiration the graceful swaying lines of her figure as it moved between tree-boles and slanting sunbeams, the grey gown suddenly stopped, and all at once Dollie faced about, and then began running — yes, actually running towards him.

She did not seem at all surprised at seeing him, but all her newly-assumed primness fell off her like a cloak; it was the old Dollie, self-forgetful and impulsive, who ran up to him, with her little gloved hands outstretched, and a startled look in her blue eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Lyndhurst, I am so glad you followed me!"—(who told her he was following

her?)—"there is that man—poor Mrs. Reid's son, you know—sitting on the bench yonder, and he looks so dreadfully ill;" and Dollie looked up in Grey's face as though all Solomon's wisdom was there.

"Never mind him, we will walk the other way," replied Grey soothingly; a feeling of rapture came over him that this dear little creature should be appealing to him again for protection; but, to his intense surprise, Dollie still stood hesitating.

"That wouldn't be right, would it?" she said seriously. "It would be too much like the Levite, you know, passing by on the other side; one must help even an enemy if he be in distress."

"Well, you don't want me to go and look at him, I suppose?" asked Grey, very much puzzled by this view of the case.

"I think it would be better; it would be more Christian," returned Dollie, looking excessively good. "He is wiping his face, and he seems in such pain, and I thought I heard him groan. I suppose one ought to be kind even to sinners," she finished, with a plead-

ing glance, that was not without its effect; for Grey said very briefly—

"Very well, let us go and look at him;" as he would have done if Dollie had pressed him to go and visit all the condemned felons at Newgate.

But when he got to the bench, he owned that her charity was right; the miserable man before them was evidently in severe bodily distress; one of his paroxysms of coughing had come over him, and he was now stooping over his stick with laboured breath and bloodless lips, as though some of his life had gone out of him.

He looked up at them for a few moments without speaking and without surprise; and then again he wiped the clammy drops from his forehead.

Grey eyed him long and attentively; it was by no special wish of his own that he was acting the Good Samaritan to this man; but, if Dollie would have it so,—and he shrugged his shoulders mentally.

"You seem very ill," he said at last in the dry stiff voice with which Grey generally veiled his kindest purposes; "don't you think it ex-

tremely foolish to be sitting so long in the cold air?"

"Maybe," he replied indifferently; "not that it matters much in the long run. I have pretty nearly come to the end of everything, so they tell me;" and his defiant look returned.

"Whom do you mean by they?"

"Why, the doctors, of course; and a precious lot of fools they are, not to be able to patch up a fellow better—both lungs gone—as though they expect me to believe them!"

"Well, anyhow, you had better take my advice and go home."

"All in good time, Mr. Lyndhurst," was the cool answer. He seemed reviving a little. "I just crept up here to see if I could catch sight of one of you. Well, now you are here, you can tell me; how is she?" nodding his head in the direction of the chateau.

Then Grey's sternness returned.

"How dare you ask when you know what mischief you have done?"

"Do you mean that I—pooh, why do you try and frighten me?" but a ghastly look of fear crossed his face.

Grey hardly knew what he should answer; but Dollie, woman-like in her mercy, interposed. Her tender little heart had begun to yearn over this sinner; hardened, cruel, murderous, as he was, he was Mrs. Reid's son, and her own cousin; and then he was dying. Yes, Dollie was sure he was dying!

"You were very wicked!" she said; and her fresh young voice made them both start. "You almost killed her, but she is not yet dead. She lies there and knows no one, and talks of nothing but the past; you are always in her thoughts; it is Walter! Walter! Walter! from morning to night."

"She talks of me!" and then to their intense surprise—and because the man's heart was not quite dead within him, and because he was wasted with fear and weakness—the poor wretch before them suddenly burst into tears.

He was ashamed of it after a moment, and wiped his eyes with a ragged handkerchief, and swore at himself under his breath for being such a soft fool; and all the while the Divine spark of grace lay under the miserable

wreck and ruin of the man, faintly and dimly burning within him, roused by the sight of the grey head that had lain so near his feet—love and sorrow lying at the feet of the sinner!

Grey held his peace, with a sort of disgust and terror of hypocrisy; but all the woman woke in Dollie, and she laid her hand on Walter's shoulder—noting as she did so the shabby, threadbare aspect of the man — and called him softly by his name, for was he not her cousin?

"I am glad you can cry, Walter; it shows you are not all bad—that you are sorry, I mean." Henceforth Walter's memory lost much of its blackness in Dollie's eyes; had he not shed tears in her presence? was he not ashamed and sorry? she always said. "You ought to be very thankful that your mother is still alive."

He shook his head sullenly; but she had called him Walter, and touched him; and the sign and link of fellowship was not wholly lost on the poor outcast, though he answered her gruffly enough.

"You seem bent, the whole lot of you, on

treating me like a murderer," he muttered. "What have I done? I wanted to see my mother; I wanted to make her change her mind, and see if things could not be more comfortable. It was Mally's fault; Mally put me on the scent, and forced me to do the whole business; if she dies, it was Mally killed her, not I. I won't have that on my conscience, I tell you I won't," speaking with such loudness and violence that Dollie shrank from him again and crept closer to Grey.

"Who is Mally?" she whispered.

"I suppose he means his wife; he has a wife, I believe." Then, as though questioning her sweet face, and reading it truly, he continued in a more cordial tone.

"Come, Reid, this will never do; I can't leave you sitting any longer on that damp bench; why, it is perfect madness! Show me where you are living, and I will help you to get there; come now, don't keep me waiting;" and then Grey nodded to Dollie, as much as to say, "All right, I won't lose sight of him," and then she looked gratefully at him and slowly retraced her steps.

It was a tough piece of business for Grey, but he got through it manfully. Walter walked slowly and with difficulty; every now and then there was a halt, and a fit of coughing. "I took fresh cold that night," he gasped. "I was better—I was laughing in my sleeve at all the doctors before that,—but Mally drove me out that evening; she said I was a molly-coddle, and that my cough was nothing; she will be the death of us both, that woman."

"Good heavens, Reid, are you speaking of your wife?"

"A nice wife!" he growled; "the curse and torment of my life. I slipped the noose round my neck when I was a mere lad, and she has been helping me down hill ever since. Why am I without a centime?" and he shook his empty pocket. "She has spent the allowance, every farthing of it. Last night she pawned one of the blankets off the bed; but there was no coffee for breakfast—no soup for dinner. When a man is half starved as I am, there is not much chance for him."

Grey's hand was in his pocket, fingering a

napoleon, but on second thoughts he withdrew it. "How do I know he is speaking the truth?" he said to himself. "I know poor Mrs. Reid has always allowed him a good income—at least a sufficient income. I will go with him all the way, and see how matters really stand with him."

They were threading the long dull street in the centre of which is the church of the Redemptorist, and after a few moments they had turned into a narrower one. Walter stopped before a high shabby-looking house, with some children playing noisily in the small back court; the entry was close and dark, the stairs steep and with awkward twists and turnings. Grey followed his heavy climbing footsteps with some difficulty; they seemed ascending to the very top of the house.

"This is my suite of apartments," said Walter with a covert sneer in his voice, as he threw open a door. "We had better ones in Paris, furnished with crimson and gold, but they were not to Mally's taste. Mally, I have brought a gentleman to see you; put on your company manners and bid him welcome."

The tone of his voice was indescribable; there was a mixture of defiance and despair in it; it seemed to say, "Look at her, Mr. Lyndhurst—look at the couple of us; there is a wife for a man." Grey followed him in and stood hat in hand. The woman dozing by the stove—a fireless stove—roused up stupidly and looked at them; she was a gaunt, almost an aged woman, and as she pushed back the black handkerchief that covered her grey hair, Grey looked at the harsh outlines of the face, the dull crafty black eyes, and the coarse cruel nature of the woman was plainly visible to him.

Poor miserable Walter! Heaven help him indeed! He had married as a boy a woman old enough to be his mother; and he was still young, and, but for his degradation, a fine handsome-looking man, and she was an old woman, only with the womanhood, the softness and sweetness and the goodness of it, gone out of her.

Grey looked at her, and then round at the comfortless bare room; there was an inner chamber with a bed, on which some rumpled

bedclothes were lying, and by it an empty packing case, and an old greatcoat flung on it; the window was dirty and high up in the roof; there was a round table with a bottle and some glasses, and a pack of soiled cards; two of the chairs were broken—such were the squalid quarters where Mrs. Reid's only son was lodged.

"Come, rouse up and speak to him, Mally," continued Walter recklessly; and then he rubbed his hands and looked at the cold black stove and the empty bottle, and chuckled and shivered, and coughed his dry hard cough; and the evil spirit that Dollie had partly exorcised came into him again.

"What do you mean by your havers, waking me out of the blessed sleep, which is all I've had for the two past nights?" returned Mally viciously; and then, as her dim, stupid eyes took in Grey standing trim and resolute by the door, her tone became cringing: "And is it the gentleman you are leaving out in the cold, Walter?" she exclaimed, for Mally was an Irishwoman, and though she had married a gentleman, or thought she

had married one, the old brogue still came up sometimes. "Put a chair for the gentleman, Walter. Is it one of your grand relatives?" peering at him with her greedy black eyes.

"A very distant connection, amounting to next to none," returned Grey with much decision. "Look here, Mrs. Reid,—I am speaking for your good,—if you have any influence with your husband, keep him away from the Chateau de St. Aubert."

"Ay, ay, he is right there, Mally; if she die—if my mother die," hissing out the words with a concentrated tone of hatred and bitterness, "her death will lie at your door."

Mally shot a vindictive look at him; possibly a torrent of Irish abuse would have been launched at him but for Mr. Lyndhurst's presence; as it was, she returned sulkily to her seat, cowed by Grey's tone and manner. He saw his advantage, and followed it up without hesitation.

"You will gain nothing by attempting an entrance. Your unfortunate mother lies between life and death," he went on, turning to Walter; "a few weeks, a few days, may see the

end of all; will you give me your word that you will do nothing to disturb her peace—at least not peace—you have robbed her of that for evermore — but the quiet which is all the dying ask?"

There was an irresistible shudder, but no answer; only Mally said in a shrill whisper, "Don't let them make you promise anything, Walter; they want to get the money for themselves;" but Mr. Lyndhurst took no notice of her.

"Promise me that," he continued. "Give me your word of honour to be guided by me in this, and I will guarantee that you shall be no loser; none of us can tell what arrangements your mother may have made concerning her property. You are the best judge how little claim you can have on that, but as long as she lies in this state, unable to decide for herself, I will take care that a proper weekly sum, sufficient for your comfortable maintenance, shall be allowed you. I have influence enough with Miss Morell to pledge my word for that."

Mally's eyes grew greedy. "Ask him how much, Walter," she said under her breath; but

Grey heard her and turned sternly upon her.

"Why do you interfere? this is none of your business," he said harshly; "it lies between your husband and me. I will not trust you with his money. Do you think that I cannot see how you and your shiftless ways have helped to drag him down?" He was surprised at himself for daring to provoke the termagant in her, but his anger against her was great.

"Look at this room," he continued; "is this the place for a man by birth a gentleman? why is not your husband on a sickbed? Why are you not nursing him instead of driving him out to meet his death on this chill November evening? Shame on you, Mrs. Reid, for you bear his name and have taken no wifely duty on you." And Grey having worked himself up to this pitch of indignation took up his hat, despite Mally's whining protestations, and began climbing down the stairs again.

Walter followed him. "I promise," he said in a sullen tone, when they had reached the lower passage.

"You are wise," returned Grey briefly, and then again he fingered the napoleon, but a glance at the drawn and wasted face before him, so terribly altered in the last two days, seemed to change his purpose.

"No, I will not give you money to-night; I dare not, with that woman upstairs. I will do better; I will send you in some nicely-dressed food from a restaurant, and some fuel, and to-morrow I will speak to Dr. Arnaud about you; you shall have medical aid at once."

"It is no use," replied Walter despairingly, "but thank you, thank you kindly, all the same. Perhaps you are right about the money; she would drink it all; she has been at her old tricks again to-night. Would you believe it, Mr. Lyndhurst," he went on with a loud laugh, "that Mally was a handsome, buxom-looking creature when I saw her first—a little too old perhaps for a lad like me, but as fine a woman as a man need see." He paused a moment and went on: "I saw her first in Dublin acting 'Mrs. Halley' in the 'Stranger'—was it Mrs. Halley? I forget names so—but I know I lost my heart to her. Till the child died, she

was not a bad sort of wife to me; but then she took to drinking—she says I taught her—and then it was all up with us."

"I never knew you had a child," observed Grey in surprise.

"Yes, a little girl; we called her Isabel, after you know whom," with a sudden quiver in his voice; "such a pretty little creature! just the image of Mally, black-eyed and roguish. Oh, but that was a bad business!" breaking off with an oath.

"Tell me about it," said Grey kindly—he wondered if Mrs. Reid had ever heard that there was a child—and Walter complied, though with some reluctance.

"Well, Mally would go on acting—though she promised me to give up all that sort of thing at our marriage. We were well off, and I was a soft young fool, desperately in love, and confoundedly jealous. But no, she had the stage fever, and act she would.

"She used to go out night after night, and leave little Belle—we called her Belle—in the care of a mere girl. I was out too, for the gambling mania was strong on me; but I

always went up and kissed little Belle in her crib, and had a game with her, and I used to bring her home toys and sweets, for which she paid me in kisses—for she was a happy little creature."

He stopped and leant against the banisters. "No, I can't go on; it is too horrible. Mally was prancing on the stage one night, and I was losing my money over the cards,—curse them,—and the girl was gallivanting with her lover, and the crib-curtain caught fire; that wretch of a servant-girl" (here Walter had added a stronger word) "had left the candle too near, and the door was open, and somehow the window too, and—and Belle was too badly burnt to recover—she was quite dead, the darling, when I came home in the grey morning."

He stopped again, and Grey thought he heard him sob in the darkness.

"That's all I can tell you. Then Mally took to drinking because she said the child's screams were always in her ears, and she grew into what you see her; and as for me——" Walter struck himself heavily on the chest,

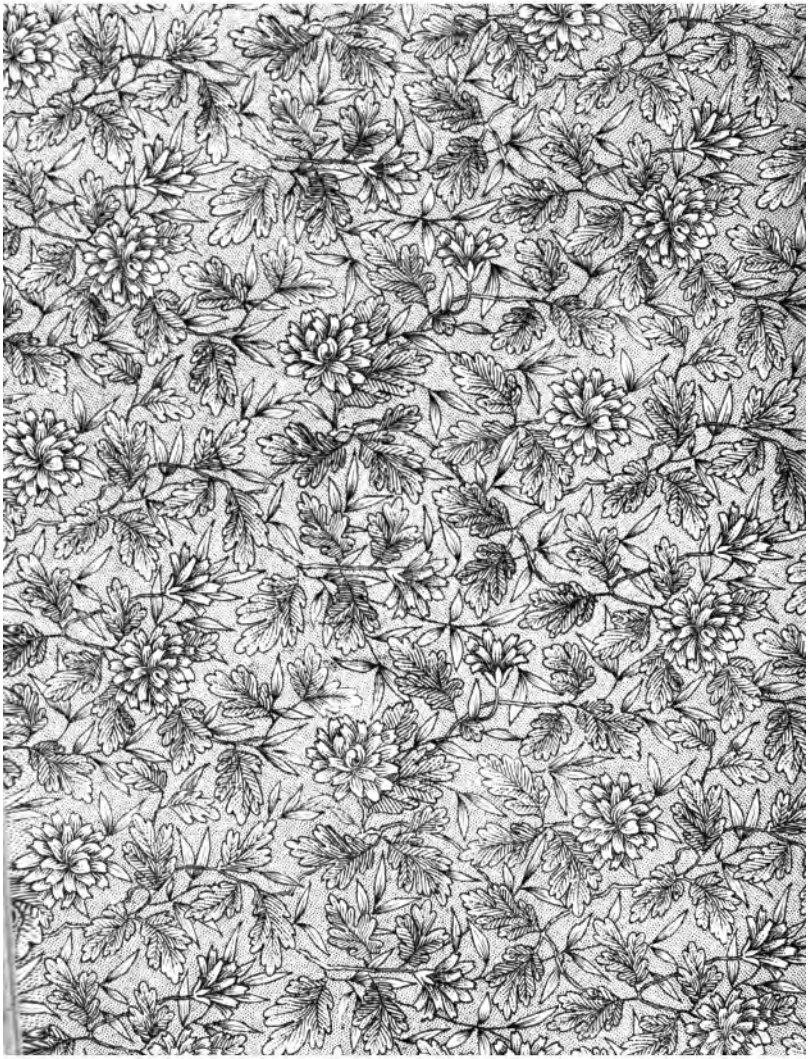
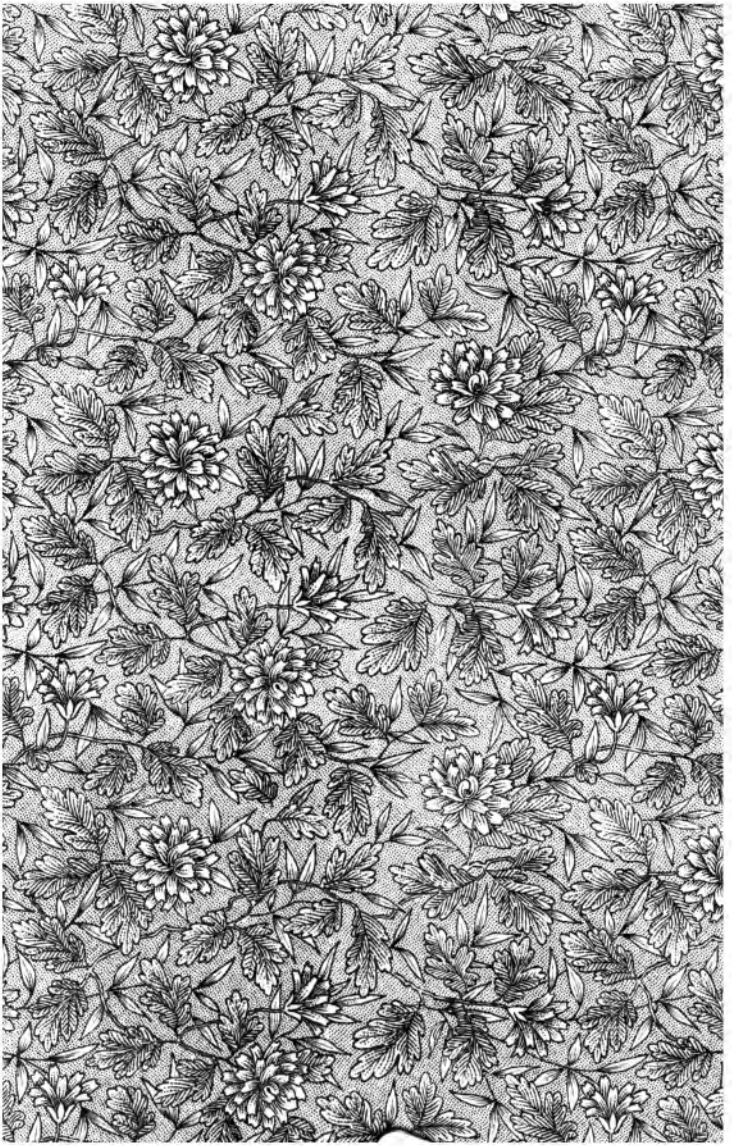
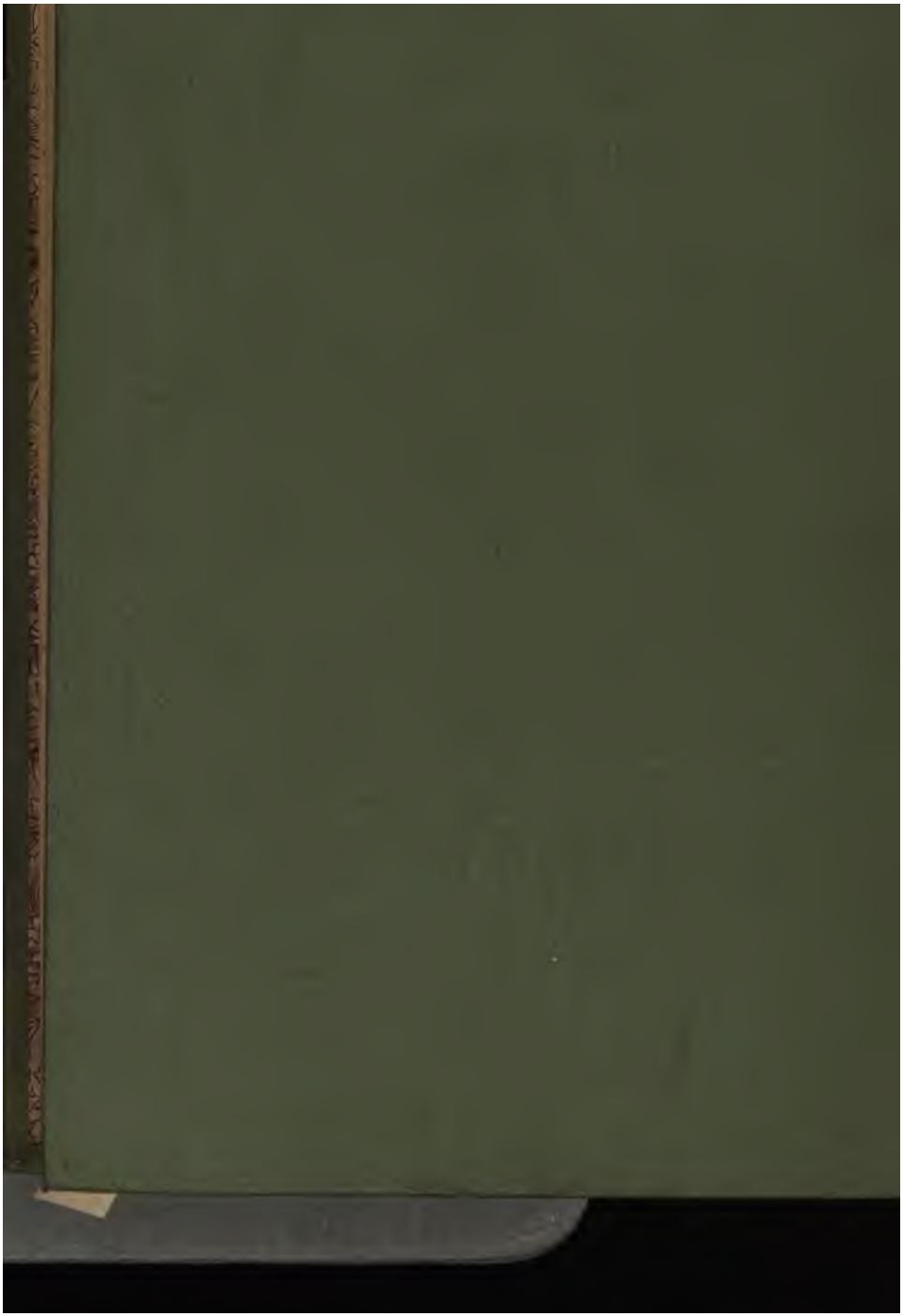
and gave a bitter little laugh, but Grey grasped his hand.

"I will come and see you again; we will have some more talk together," he said; and his voice trembled with feeling.

"And you will tell me about her?"

"Yes, I will bring you news of her; go back and be patient with that poor creature. I see now that you were the first to teach her to sin, and now you must help her to repent. Good-bye, I will come again to-morrow;" and then as he strode from the door and hurried down the street, he blessed Dollie in his heart for first holding out the olive branch of peace to the poor wanderer.

END OF VOL. I.

S. & H.

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